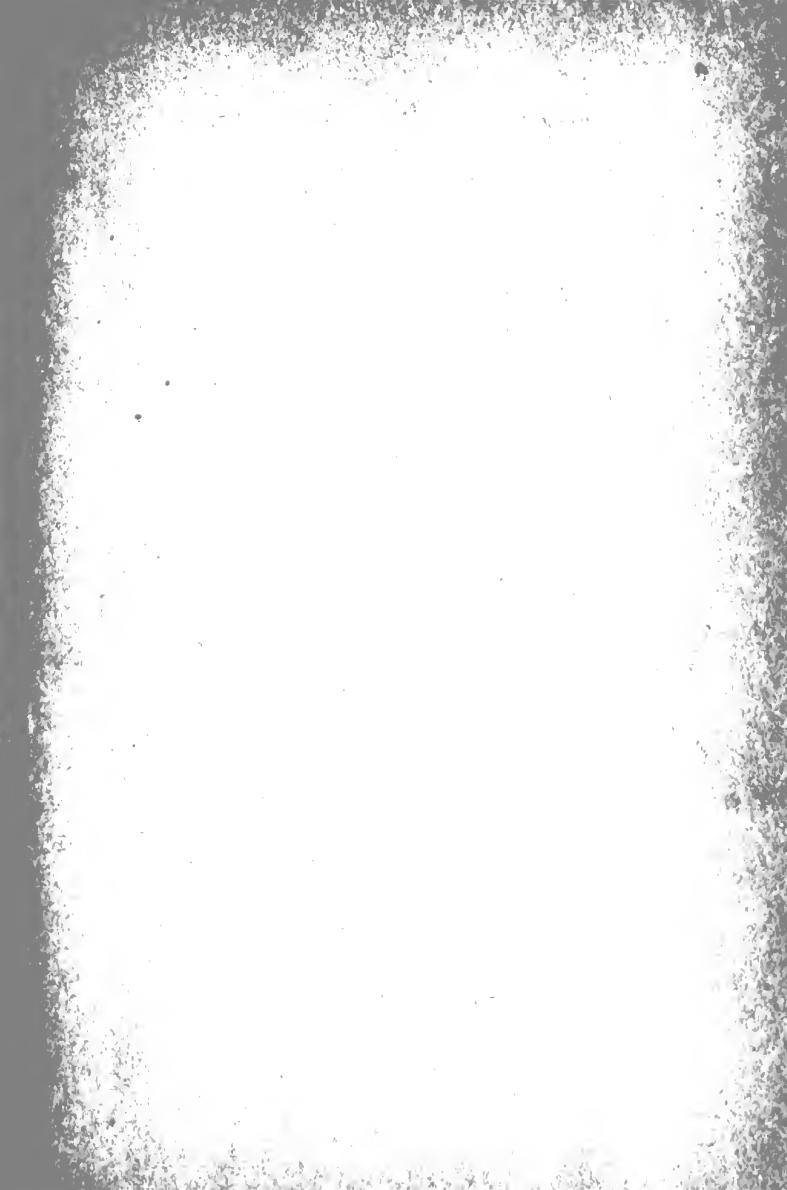




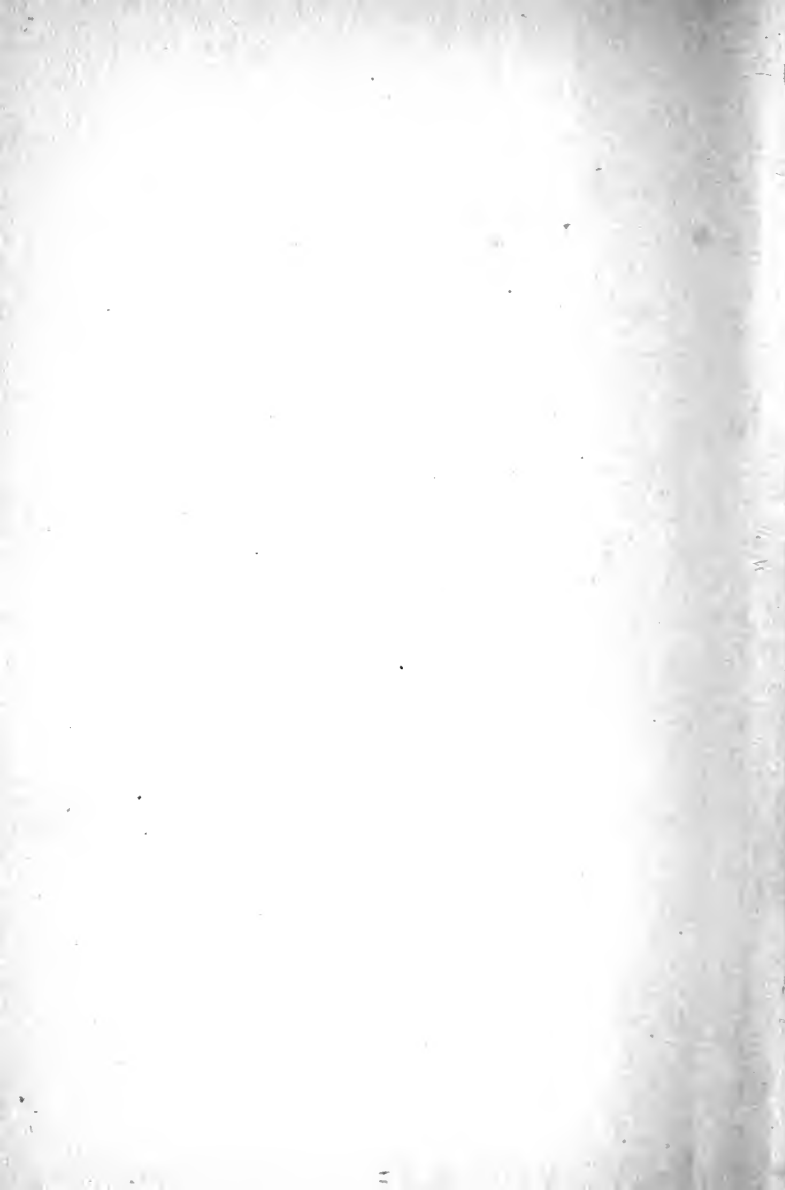
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BY

Mrs. J. KENT SPENDER

AUTHOR OF "MR. NOBODY," "PARTED LIVES," "RECOLLECTIONS OF
A COUNTRY DOCTOR," "LADY HAZLETON'S CONFESSION"
"A WAKING," "A STRANGE TEMPTATION"
ETC., ETC.

"Goodness admits of no excess, but error"

—*Lord Bacon*

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A MODERN QUIXOTE.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

STEPHEN DILLWYN IS CHALLENGED.

MEANWHILE Stephen Dillwyn had had a trying time at Rome. The task which he had undertaken in promising his friend Colville that he would look after Filomena was harder than he had imagined, and he was completely unsuited for it. From the time when the cameo-worker had succumbed to his fatal disease, and his daughter had to struggle for herself, her temper had decidedly become soured. In the *Conservatoire* at Milan she learnt to find her own level; and the high expectations which her vanity and the advice of her friends had formed for her (when she adopted music as a profession) were already more or less disappointed. Stephen Dillwyn

had always thought the whole affair rather foolish. An artist himself, and knowing the difficulties of artists, he was better able to estimate the chances which were against her.

He had not been surprised when she came back to Rome, discontented with the position which the Milanese professors had allotted to her among the seventy-nine other students trained at the *Conservatoire*.

It was no news to Stephen that in a battle-field of this sort many hopes like Filomena's must be dashed to the ground ; and that for the few singers who succeeded, the majority would be obliged to struggle on in obscurity.

It was pitiful to see the efforts which she made in studying her various expressions before the looking-glass—rolling her eyes in a manner which was really alarming, and moving her jaw as she accentuated each one of her little runs—before she performed at the *café chantant* where she now earned a precarious living.

Stephen had already written to Colville that he had had rather a "quencher" with the way the girl went on.

"She cuts up rough," he wrote, "when you attempt to interfere with her; and the passion which frizzles out is too much for one's nerves. She is a *poseuse*. It is not art, but all this posing comes to her naturally."

Stephen himself had been unexpectedly successful. His "Vestal Virgin" had been exhibited at the "New Gallery," and had attracted a good deal of critical attention from the originality of the treatment and the novelty of the design. He was now very busy with his Pompeian pictures; his latest idea being to represent a woman at a wine-stall, dealing out the wine to thirsty purchasers. Rather unfortunately he had selected Filomena as a model. He had considered that it would supply her with a little extra money, and she made a capital model. Her only fault in this respect was that she was too large for Stephen's taste.

"She is a Caryatid," he said laughingly, "and her opinions are Rhadamantine. She lays down the law in a way which brooks no contradiction, and has a will of iron."

"She has a lot in her," he admitted on another occasion, "and ought to be a good artist."

"Ought to be!" That was the bitterness of it. The taste for music which she had shown in girlhood had not been cultivated sufficiently early. Her aspirations had been nipped in the bud, and her voice roughened by the way in which she had forced it on her throat. She told no one what the Signori Giovanni and Leoni had said to her—that nothing could bring back the time which had been lost, or cure her of the fatally bad habits which she had acquired during the years when she had accustomed herself to strain the magnificent organ with which nature had originally endowed her. It made it all the worse, that though she had had the best advice in spite of this discouraging opinion, at the greatest musical centre of Italy, she was obliged

still to continue shrieking at the little tavern, and straining her voice whenever she came to Rome. At Milan her life had been a hard one. Filomena had been satisfied with the bowl of soup and the hunches of bread supplied for luncheon and dinner at the boarding-house where she lodged for two francs a day. The smell of the petroleum stove had been terrible in this *pension*, and had been combined with other fumes to which the Roman girl had been more or less accustomed from her infancy. But when Filomena failed, and found to her mortification that she was the butt of the class—not because of her failure, but because she had foolishly boasted of the splendour and magnificence of her voice—she would attribute her deficiencies entirely to the smell of the petroleum, which she declared petulantly had got into her throat.

She would clench her hands after these failures, and vow that she would succeed in spite of every one—and that it was jealousy which made even the professors give unfavourable opinions. She would

declare that they had their favourites, and were set against her, and then she would sit down to practise her solfeggios and arias with all the old habits uncorrected, and envy and malice gnawing at her heart.

She was not a favourite with her own sex, who thought that there was something dangerous about her dark forbidding style of beauty. She inspired the English girls with a sort of terror, and the French ones shrugged their shoulders at her.

But in the course of dramatic lessons, in which the other students were sometimes shy, Filomena generally scored. She was nothing if she was not exaggerative ; and Stephen, who was often nervous, was made almost ill by the shock of finding her, unexpectedly one day, at her lodgings, rolling on the floor and practising how to imitate the agonies of death by poison.

Nothing but his loyalty to the man who had saved his life but a short time before, could have led him to tolerate Filomena and her pantomimic

gestures. She was never forgetful of the fact that she was a contralto, and not only spoke occasionally in a voice which seemed to come out of her boots, but kept a stern frown on hand for the purposes of tragedy.

Stephen started, as perhaps she had intended him to start, when, in the intervals between the sittings, she burst out with "Deh non voler!" placing her hand on her heart, or "Il segreto per esse felice" given in rollicking, theatrical, racy style. But when she proceeded to denounce him as a fancied adversary, in vehement abuse, with her clenched fist above her head, as she explained afterwards "all for practice," he declared, to her intense delight, that it had the effect of making his hand shaky, and that he could not paint so well for the rest of the day.

Anything seemed to him better than that she should continue to declaim in this Roman *café chantant*; for it was a drinking saloon and a hall for operatic amusement rolled into one, which took

the place of our English music halls. But Filomena had been too proud to make her *début* in some of the smaller provincial towns where she would have had to dress in a barn, and supply the expenses of her toilet out of her meagre pocket money. And the agent who touted for engagements at the smaller theatres made a favour of offering her anything, however unimportant, unless she would consent to bind herself to him without payment for a term of three or four years.

In Rome it was rather different ; she had friends to help her. And, as she was undeniably a handsome girl, a few young men from the better classes looked in at her performances.

This soon became a cause for abundant anxiety.

For Rome is a gossiping place. Like all cities where the inhabitants have recently regained their freedom, the signs of degeneracy are not to be thrown off in a day. And the love of small talk, or, what is worse, wicked tales told over teacups, tales with a *double entendre*, at which women are

not ashamed to laugh as well as the men, was a sort of scandal appreciated in Rome.

Many anecdotes were soon afloat about Filomena and the interest which the English artist, Mr. Colville, was supposed to take in her. The English, as more than one Roman matron did not hesitate to say, threw the mantle of their supposed respectability over very queer goings-on. Young men were the same all over the world; and it was considered certain that Colville had some very practical motive when he burdened himself with the education of a girl so undeniably good-looking. It was the way with these Englishmen; it was a part of their Protestant religion, when they had any religion at all, to keep up a pretence that they were conferring a benefit, when they were really only amusing themselves. It was a part of the want of humour of the English nation to suppose that other people did not see through them when they tried to propitiate Mrs. Grundy, and persuaded themselves that by propitiating her

they would be certain to go to the right place, though all their neighbours might be shut out.

After this many anecdotes were told about Filomena. The mere fact of the singer being endowed with an unusual style of beauty, or of her making eyes at the men, or attitudinising as she sang, would in itself have been too common to excite remark ; but attention had been attracted to her by other circumstances, and especially by the way in which she and her family had been taken up by a man whose own history was like a romance ; inasmuch as it was rumoured that he had once been rich and important, and that his social descent was a matter of choice.

Stephen Dillwyn was too loyal a friend to think of vexing Norman Colville or hastening his return by telling him of the foolish tales that were being circulated during his absence. So far as his own reputation was concerned, he knew that Norman would disdain to set the matter right.

But it became more serious when a woman was

concerned, and when that woman was as careless of appearances as Filomena.

She fretted a good deal more about the need of money at this crisis, and the dire necessity for going about in rags in private life on account of the necessary expenditure on her costumes for the evening, than about any reports that were circulated to her disadvantage. It indeed struck Stephen with a sort of horror that she was the sort of girl who might not disdain to take advantage of this talk, and even to foster it for her own purposes.

More than once he had found the girl's mother in tears when he visited her ; but she was a silly old woman, who had generally bored him. He remembered in sudden panic that her daughter had always been able to turn her round her little finger, and that Filomena might induce the mother to call Colville to account for his conduct ; whilst his self-sacrificing friend was just the Quixotic fellow who could be easily worked upon by the agonies of women even to the extent of repairing

any injury supposed to be caused by his own good-natured imprudence.

“ He was always imprudent, even about those strikes. See how the men are rising *now*, and how they can no longer be induced to listen to reason ! One plays with forces of this sort with the best intent ; but it is like setting fire to a prairie, there is never any knowing where the conflagration will stop. For my part I mean to stick to my work like a cobbler to his last, and leave other people to set the world right. If you meddle at all you may do a precious lot more harm than good,” reflected Stephen, who, being somewhat inclined to take the impress of every man with whom he came in contact, was rapidly developing into a staunch Conservative in Colville’s absence.

But his nature was grateful and affectionate ; and having been touched to the quick by Colville’s kindness to him, he was much disturbed by the turn which events were taking, and determined not to leave Rome just at this crisis.

Had he required anything more to clench his resolution it would have been the forward and defiant way in which Filomena said, stretching out her arms and legs in her somewhat masculine fashion, after she had been sitting for him a little longer than usual: "This cannot go on. I am tired out with so much work. It makes me ache all over to stand so long in one position. You must really write to Mr. Colville—if you still refuse to give me his address. Write to him and tell him that I am ruining my voice—so much fatigue is not good for it, and that he must give me some more money if I am to keep body and soul together."

"I quite refuse to do so," said Stephen, putting down his sheaf of brushes. "You know that you have no claim whatever on Mr. Colville. You're only one of the many *protégés* whom his kindness has put in the way of earning a livelihood. But now that he has set you going you ought to do without his help. He is too tender-hearted. I

should be afraid for you two to come together—you might take advantage of his kindness.”

“Ah, you acknowledge my power over him—you hate me, but you at least do *that*,” she said with a conscious simper, as she put on her hat.

Stephen bit his lip, annoyed at the admission he had made. He did not like Filomena. It even seemed impossible to him to paint her. For, when she looked most attractive, her attractions were not of the sort for which he cared. It certainly was not complimentary to Filomena, that he lately had been reminding himself of a story about Titian who, when he had been asked slyly by some stranger where he hid the beautiful model whom it was scarcely fair for him to keep to himself, called his dirty colour-grinder, with roughened hands and coarse features, who always stood to him as a model. Possibly it was because the weather was again becoming warm, and Stephen, though he was scarcely aware of it, was far from well, that behind Filomena, as she stood for him on the dais,

there appeared to be always another personality more fascinating and winning—that of a real Pompeian girl, who seemed to beckon to him to paint her. He saw her just as she stood at the wine-shop in those far-away days, smiling at the Pompeian swells as they cooled their thirst at the shop.

Unconsciously as he painted, Filomena's thick eyebrows became arched and delicate, her rosy lips, which were rather heavy, took the shape of a Cupid's bow, her contours, which were now rich and gracious, threatening to be a little too rounded in old age, became lithe and slender.

She was not good—that Pompeian girl ; perhaps not even so good as Filomena.

She was coquettish, but she was *real*—if she was not even as honest as Filomena was in spite of all her roughness. And there were excuses to be made for the Pompeian girl because of her surroundings. It was possible that she had even looked in at the temple of Isis with its horrible mysteries. But

that was all over now, and the pain which had frayed away the garment of flesh setting the spirit free might have purified her. No pain could be idle and purposeless ; it must all have subserved some end as a part of the whole which we shall understand at last ; and even that eruption of Vesuvius must have meant ultimate good.

If Norman Colville had been in Rome he would have known that Stephen was sickening with his old malady when he thought of the past in this morbid fashion. It was now in the middle of July, and the heat was becoming intense. The summer breezes, so beneficial in other places, were beginning to be stifling in Rome, and men shrank from the breaths of hot air as if from poisonous kisses. The gardens round Rome were filled with flowers, but the flowers already hung upon their stalks weak from the want of air and water. The heavens above were grey rather than blue, for the blue had become so intense as to deepen into Prussian blue or steely-grey. It never rained, but a hot mois-

ture seemed to ascend from the ground. In the Campagna already the malaria had begun—the system of drainage so perfected by the ancient Romans never being properly understood by the moderns. Stephen's head ached. The old lassitude was taking possession of him as he dragged his limbs wearily about.

Nothing would induce him to leave. In his heart he acknowledged that he waited for Colville's sake. He did not know what might happen if he suddenly took himself off. Colville might return unexpectedly at any time, and that manœuvring girl would certainly get possession of him.

"He was ready to lay down his life for me; and it would be hard if I could not do a little for him in return," thought the young artist as the days lagged on, and he constantly experienced a difficulty in breathing. He did the best he could for himself, closing his shutters in the daytime and lying down on a settee in his cool large studio.

He was thankful for its size just now, though he could do no work and had to content himself with piteous glances at his unfinished canvases turned with their faces to the wall. Whenever he looked at them he decided that they were hopelessly bad. That was a part of his unhealthy condition, though he did not know it.

The only occasions on which he could saunter out were the evenings; and on those he sometimes amused himself by playing billiards in a room open to the fresh air, and much frequented by artists and the younger musicians who lived in Rome.

One evening when he felt as if he were too tired to play, and was reclining on a lounge near one of the pillared arches, he overheard some of the other men laughing heartily at a joke, and caught Filomena's name.

It was one of the racy stories they were fond of telling about her at that time. But recalling her mother's tears and picturing to himself how indig-

nant Norman would be, Stephen forgot his languor and leapt to his feet.

“It is all a pack of lies!” he cried in a stentorian voice, which echoed through the room.

There was silence for a moment, and then another voice, hoarse with the effort at self-control, answered:

“I am not in the habit of telling lies”.

“And I also am in the habit of speaking the truth; and I must tell you that many lies resented by her friends have been circulated at this lady’s expense.”

Another silence ensued, which was broken by the Italian answering in vibrating tones: “Take care, sir; we have our own code of honour here, which is different from that of your country. Most Englishmen are like women, and refuse to fight.”

The insinuation had the effect which it was intended to have upon a man of Stephen’s well-known nervous and excitable character. If there was one imputation more than another of which he had a horror, it was that of being a coward—possibly

because there was something in his own nature which made him conscious that there was a measure of truth in the imputation. Stephen was a man of peaceable temperament, who had often confided to his intimate friends that he looked upon war as a savage and brutal thing, invented by the powerful ones of the earth for the destruction of the weak and helpless.

He had always felt certain that if he had been a soldier he should have been conscious of a quaking of the limbs directly a battle began, and should only have been restrained from running away by the knowledge that there was nowhere to run to. He had his own convictions on the subject, and was indignant at the idea that a certain portion of the human race should arrogate to itself the power of sending another portion into the shambles to be killed like sheep; but these were thoughts which he would not have confessed for fear of being thought squeamish.

He had forgotten all such theories now when the

feeling of racial antagonism, insular prejudice, and wounded pride prompted him to rush at his opponent.

To the credit of the Italians and the few Spaniards who were present, for nearly every Englishman had fled from Rome on account of the unhealthiness of the season, it must be recorded that a few men clustered round Stephen and endeavoured to hold him back. Some of them admired his genius, and others were manly enough to resent the conduct of a bully who was offering insult to a foreigner, who had no one to stand by him, and who had been roused into a fury of outraged patriotism by the imputation cast upon his nation.

But Stephen could no longer be restrained. He shook off the friendly hands and cried :—

“Englishmen are no cowards—the true cowards are those who insult unprotected women”.

Then there arose a sort of inarticulate sound—the murmur of the voices of men who tried to

interpose as peacemakers. Whatever might be the fashion in some sections of society, duelling was generally discouraged in the art circles as inconsistent with the interests of art.

But loudest and most imperative, dominating all the other voices, rose the voice of the successful bully, Count Bellotti, the well-known duellist.

“Englishmen are not only cowards, they are damned hypocrites. Would any man but a hypocritical Englishman pay the expenses of a girl’s education, and take the trouble to pose as a philanthropist, when he wishes to snare his bird?”

This sally was first of all greeted with a burst of mocking laughter from those who had begun to range themselves on Bellotti’s side. But a moment afterwards there was a hush. The murmur of voices was silenced, and in the stillness which followed a fly might almost have been heard to crawl on a pane of glass—so it seemed to the strained attention of some of the lookers-on—as the young Englishman, he who was known to be to Colville as

Orestes was to Pylades, and whose triumphs with his successful pictures had lately been in all men's mouths, rose, white as a sheet, but with every nerve strung up, and every muscle strained. The other men made way for him as he walked to the centre of the room, and said calmly and distinctly :—

“ I claim satisfaction in your own fashion. *We* have a proverb that in Rome one must do as Rome does. We have another custom which may be almost better than yours, that when any man insults a defenceless woman, or plays fast and loose with the character of an absent friend, we administer a horsewhipping. But that Count Bellotti may understand that his slanders cannot touch a man so infinitely above him in all that is noble and true, and that his name is not worthy to be mentioned with that of Norman Colville, I comply with the habits of your country, and adopt the only plan which you will give me of disproving his vile insinuations.”

More than one of those who listened to this

speech trembled for the daring lad. A slap on the face would have been nothing to the language in which he couched his answer; and Bellotti's laugh rang out much as Goliath's had done when a shepherd boy accepted his challenge.

Somehow such coolness had not been expected of Stephen Dillwyn; but though some of the men were sorry for him, none of them took such steps as might even then have effectually prevented the duel. Etiquette prevented any one from interfering when the young fellow, whose early death might be such a loss to Art, left the room calmly, gracefully, and even pleasantly, only lingering long enough at the entrance of the billiard-room to name his seconds, and appoint the morrow for them to call upon him.

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE THE DUEL.

STEPHEN'S blood was still up when he went out into the coolness of the night air and looked up to the silent stars ; but he was so thoroughly exhausted by the effort he had made, that he slept that night completely worn out. This idea of a hostile meeting had come upon him unawares. He had terrible misgivings, but it seemed to him too late to withdraw—his horror of showing cowardice rendering him an easy prey, and ready to fall into the snare which had been laid for him. That an Englishman should be supposed to be less willing to resent an affront than the hot-blooded men of other nations was an accusation he felt bound to disprove, and which would have been inconsistent with the impulse of revenge which was new to him.

On the following morning he awoke as if from a bad dream, recalling one by one the circumstances which had happened, and the mad words which he had uttered to a brute and bully like Bellotti. He had done it for Colville's sake ; but he knew now that Colville would have been the first to tell him that he had acted unwisely, and would have shown the truest moral courage by not deigning to take notice of the accusations which had been made with the purpose of inflaming him. But however unwisely he might have acted, he knew now that but one thing remained for him, to go through what he had undertaken. He was perfectly aware that his courage of the previous night was but a hybrid courage. A man of his sort was ready to cry out like Hamlet :—

Am I a coward ?

Who calls me villain ? breaks my pate across ?

Why should I take it ? for it cannot be

But I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall

To make oppression bitter.

His courage came to him in fits and starts like Hamlet's ; and the great thing would be now to keep it up, and to preserve a brave front through the interview with his seconds.

The naming of these seconds had been one of his difficulties. He had thought first of all of the English Club, though he remembered that it would be nearly deserted, as it was in July. And then he suddenly recollected, that even if it had been earlier in the season, he should have had no right to draw other Englishmen into the mess he had made for himself. It never occurred to him that a little judicious diplomacy, or, at worst, an application to the consul, might save him from settling matters in this antiquated fashion. Curiously enough, even if it *had* occurred to him he would have thought it a despicable way of making terms, and would not even have wished to avail himself of the advantage. It seemed to him sufficiently natural that impertinence should be punished in a primitive and savage fashion ; and he had

as yet no suspicion of the comic side of the episode which was to be borne in upon him later.

But looked at from the æsthetic side it was still easy to say to himself in a listless, artistic fashion : “ It is better to pay one’s debt to Nature early than late. I never cared for life so much as to wish to live to the time of wrinkles and grey hairs. I have had my day ; and why shouldn’t I clear out to make room for the millions who are jostling one another in this over-populated little globe ? ”

It sounded grand ; and as there was no Englishman to reason with him, or to make him understand that he was only exposing himself to laughter by doing something ridiculously mediæval, the young artist still bolstered himself up by the thought of the mock-heroic.

He was as ignorant as any babe of the technicalities of his strange position, and the etiquette of the preliminaries.

He had had to fall back upon two Italians who had been friendly to him—one an artist, and one a

military man who would possibly be able to give him some advice in the affair.

When they came in with their low bows he noticed they both looked serious, though neither of them suggested that it would be possible for him to withdraw.

The officer asked if it would not be better to propose swords, as being less dangerous than the use of pistols. But when he heard that Stephen had had no practice in sword-play, whilst, on the other hand, he had once been a volunteer in his own provincial town in England, in the old days when he did not trouble himself about peace or war, and when Stephen spoke lightly of the danger, they decided that after all pistols would be better, and retired with the conviction that Stephen Dillwyn must be a better shot than either of them had suspected.

The duel had been arranged for the following day, the danger of interruption having to be considered in these cases.

The difficulty was how to get through the intervening time without losing the courage which was like the puff of smoke, and liable to disappear. He found it of some use to think of the deliberate provocation which Count Bellotti had brought to bear upon him, and to which he had fallen so easy a victim. But when he thought of this he was alarmed at the sudden feeling of venomous, and almost murderous hatred which shot through his own veins. Had he then, in spite of his art instincts, those savage affinities inherited from his ancestors, the gorillas, and was it possible that he could wish to indulge in them?

No; the better way would be not to allow himself time to think. As soon as the heat abated, he took a turn in the streets, but it was like walking in a fog and being unable to recognise well-known objects. He walked in silence up the Via Frattina, and crossed the Piazza di Spagna. Then imagining that people looked at him and that his walk was less steady than usual, he turned, and

with a firmer step went to the corner of the Corso, and pretended to be very interested in the contents of the shops. But he was afraid of being accosted by some acquaintance, and of not being able to answer without seeming preoccupied; so he tramped away almost automatically, not knowing how far he had walked until he found himself under the ilex trees outside the French Academy. Beneath him the Holy City lay apparently asleep in the glorifying light of the summer afternoon; and he remembered how he and Colville had compared her to a sleeping beauty. He lingered, looking on the view beneath—the dear familiar view—every spot of which was precious to him, and pitying the perspiring sentinel who was pacing up and down in spite of the heat, and the more drowsy-looking models who sought refuge like so many cattle in the porches and shadows of the houses.

He sank almost into a dream, from which he was wakened after a time by the little tinkling bell of the convent church; but it was impossible

for him to go in. He could not have endured music just then. By-and-by, the sunset tints—primrose deepening into amber, and then into rose and amethyst—illumed the spires and towers of the distant churches, the Palatine Hill and the Capitol. The sun was slowly sinking, caressing the city as it sank; and suddenly it occurred to Stephen that it was the last sunset he might ever see.

He rose and shook himself as if from a dream. He was shivering, though the evening was intolerably warm, and then it occurred to him that what he had always dreaded had happened—his nerve had forsaken him. A sensation which was intolerable and which had never oppressed him before, but which he now knew to be the physical fear of which he had always believed himself to be capable, came over him.

It seemed to enter into his bones, to make his hair rise up on his head, to give to his flesh that peculiar coldness which the vulgar ridicule by the

name of goose-flesh. He knew that he must hasten from it ; that this real fear, this hideous fear, was a thing which could be only conquered by physical exertion. He went back to his studio and his bedroom in the Via Sistina, so rapidly as almost to run, and when he got there he sank down again on the settee breathless and almost exhausted. He remembered now that he had to write to his widowed mother in England, and that the letter would be almost impossible for him to write ; for to the fact that she would lose him would be added her horror at the mode of a death which would leave him no time for repentance and reformation. His mother was a religious woman, and had set him the example of treading warily. She had a stern way of looking at things. He himself had been too busy with his art, and all the excitement of a life which now bid fair to be successful, to do much more than toy with serious questions. Living in a transition period, when the ground had seemed constantly to shift

beneath his feet, he had been content, like most young men, to shift with the shifting ground. Had he been asked a week before, what he thought about the possibilities of a future life, he would have answered with a joke about the great Perhaps. But it was rather different when he was suddenly meditating a leap into the dark.

What should he meet there? What would there be *beyond*? His old fancies about the Vestal Virgin and the Pompeian girl suddenly occurred to him even at this crisis. Queer spirits whom he had summoned to assist him in life might claim acquaintance with him in the other world and drag him—*where*?

This way of looking at things made it no more comfortable for him when it further occurred to him that it was just possible—*possible* that by a lucky fluke he might kill his adversary. He had a horror of ghosts, and he was quite sure that if he killed a man, that man would constantly haunt him. He would never be free from the sense of his presence.

Life would be intolerable, and at nights he would be unable to sleep. It would be better to die than *that*.

After writing to his mother, and a line or two to Norman Colville, he rang for the people of the house to bring him his frugal supper, adopting a jaunty tone when they came, that they might afterwards be able to say he had at least shown plenty of pluck.

This farce accomplished, he determined to fortify himself with some champagne, purchased for rare occasions, before going to bed.

But he found it impossible to sleep. As he tossed from side to side, a new idea occurred to him. He remembered to have read in a clever French story how a man, who was nervous like himself, shot himself on the eve of a duel to avoid being suspected of cowardice. He recalled the fact that that man had been unable to sleep in his bed from the consciousness that his corpse might be laid on it on the following day, and how the poor fellow had got

up and looked in the looking-glass, being horrified at the expression of his own face.

The recollection of it got on Stephen's nerves till he, too, lit a candle, and staggered to a looking-glass, quickly recoiling from it again as a face looked back upon him which was hollow-eyed, aged and pinched by the sufferings of the last few hours.

The Frenchman—so far as he could remember—did not believe in ghosts, and had not looked beyond death ; he had certainly not thought—as an Englishman of Stephen's calibre was likely to think—of the horrors which might await him on the other side. Neither had the Frenchman his artistic distastes.

Stephen would certainly not shoot himself. His horror of anything like ugliness, and his dread of the ghastliness of death, returned to him in full force. He remembered that at Rome, in the heat of the summer, they would bury him almost directly he was dead. He thought that the ancients managed those things better, and wished he had

time to leave a will with orders for his body to be cremated. But as there was nothing else to leave, and very little money, he might only expose himself to ridicule by writing down such a wish.

Then it suddenly occurred to him that there were the pictures. And his heart sank at the thought of the encomiums but recently bestowed upon these pictures by an artist of the French *salon*.

"You will be a great man some day," that artist whose own name was constantly in men's mouths had said, with an encouraging hand-shake, as he looked at one of Stephen's pictures. No; he would never be a great man—he, who loved beauty so that tones of colour were as chords of music vibrating through his being, was to be exiled into what the Greeks had called "the Shades". His body was to be shot; and with it the optic nerve, which had transmitted to his brain the lines of beauty in which he had delighted, would be destroyed. How could there be colour and form without eyesight? how

sound and harmony without hearing? Stephen felt like Dr. Johnson when he had cried out to the surgeon : “ Do not be afraid of hurting me. I want length of life.”

And yet he was also afraid of being hurt. One of the terrors which had come upon him was that of the pain of dying.

What nonsense it was for people to talk as if pain were nothing ! Charles V. had been nearer the truth when, looking at a tombstone on which an epitaph had been written saying that the man who lay there had never known fear, he answered jokingly : “ That man could never have snuffed a candle with his finger”.

Stephen went back to bed again, and tried to comfort himself by recalling the story he had heard of another man who had escaped from the claws of a lion, and who had declared that he felt as if a pleasurable sort of mesmerism had emanated from the beast. Or of another, who had been rescued from the fangs of a crocodile, and had said that his sensations were actually beatific.

It was all very well ; but if folks had even been cut down from hanging, and declared that they rather liked it, there was no accounting for tastes ; and nobody had come back to tell the tale of being shot.

It would be all over in a moment,—that was the way people talked. If the noise of all the arsenals in the world could be concentrated in one moment, it seemed to Stephen that such a comparison might give a faint idea of what the concentrated pain of being blown into eternity might mean. Oh, he knew what they said,—that there would not be time to feel the pain ; but men who talked in those easy platitudes were not preparing to be shot the next day.

Then he cursed his own folly. He sickened with loathing at his own absurdity as he remembered that he had never cared a rap for Filomena. His feeling about the girl had been that of a petted dog which condemns his master's taste when that master takes up with an ill-conditioned puppy.

The dog can only sniff his disapproval, or walk away with his tail between his legs. And Stephen could only look sulky, and mildly hint that no good would come of it, when Norman Colville had asked him if now and then, for kindness' sake, he would give an eye to Filomena.

He had always disliked Filomena, and he almost hated her now when she seemed to stand between him and his wild dreams of possible love and happiness in future life. Oh, it was hard, *hard!* That he should be forced to die in what some people would call deadly sin; so soon to be forgotten, and with no one to pity him—all for a girl whom he had never admired; and that even if he should happen to escape with his life, his name would be coupled with hers, so that he might even be compelled to marry her.

It was hard indeed. But it would never do to allow these thoughts to go on tormenting him. Already the grey dawn was creeping into the room. Already the happy birds were stirring in

their sleep, or warbling from "dewy breasts" with cries for light. Sleep he must have at all costs, or it would go harder with him on the morrow. If he did not sleep he should inevitably show that he was afraid. Anything would be better than that. He remembered that the doctors had told him after his serious illness to take morphia should he at any time find his sleeplessness become excessive. They had represented that it would be the lesser evil of the two for him to take the morphia than to allow his nerves to become agitated by long hours of insomnia. He had the morphia by him ; the doses had been prepared. He got up and took one, but still found that he could not sleep. The effect of the morphia had been to increase his headache, to accelerate the action of the heart, and to set his pulses beating in a way which was almost maddening. He began to feel desperate, and knew that he must either increase the dose, or that the amount he had already taken would make him feel worse in the morning. There could

be no choice as to what to do. But when he again forced himself to get up, his limbs were trembling violently, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he dragged himself across the room and poured out the few drops more which he knew he could take with safety. He slept on till seven o'clock. He had told his landlady not on any account to let him sleep longer than seven, as he had an appointment at half-past eight. The good woman was much frightened, as she had considerable difficulty in waking her lodger, and did not hesitate to abuse him in rather violent language, telling him that he ought to be ashamed of himself, and that he was a drunken dog.

Stephen had just sufficient sense to bow politely, and to try to make his answer ironical; but as he rubbed his eyes he became aware that the fog which had so troubled him on the previous night, as to seem to make everything hazy, had now so much increased that his landlady's rubicund face, as she stood with her arms akimbo, loomed at him

like that of a Venus surrounded with clouds. He tried to make the best of it, and to hide from her that he staggered as he rose to get at his clothes. He had generally been so steady that this increased her indignation ; and she unconsciously added to his gnawing pangs of remorse by declaring in boisterous and excited language that she should no longer be able to keep him as a lodger if he meant to indulge in a whirl of feverish dissipation.

He dismissed her from his room with as much dignity as he could command ; and afterwards regretted that he had not resigned himself to bear the good woman's burst of fiery indignation, since he found it almost impossible to dress himself without assistance. His hands were trembling and shaky, and he had to give up the idea of shaving himself, unless he intended to inflict deep gashes on his cheeks.

This was not altogether to be regretted, as he hated the sight of the ghastly-looking object in the glass, with black rings beneath the eyes, haggard

and unkempt in the sweet light of the early morning. Even as he dressed himself he did not dare to look anywhere. For on the opposite side of the wall in large letters as of blood he seemed to see the terrible words : "Thou shalt not kill !"

That a man should commit murder for private revenge could not make the murder any better. And though he had previously intended to practise a little with his pistol, the very thought of it was now detestable to him. To begin with, he was certain that in his present state he could not shoot straight ; and next, that if it were possible for him to protect himself by punishing this man, he should always be haunted by ghosts and his own accusing conscience.

At half-past eight he drove to the spot which had been chosen for the encounter, and walked in a dazed way up a pretty little pathway through a solitary vineyard outside the walls, to the open ground where the seconds were already measuring the distances, and where he felt that he would probably be killed like a dog.

Anything rather than be absurd! Had he not entered into the whole thing because he was afraid of being laughed at?

He had a terrible suspicion that they were laughing still, and that he had been unable to hide his staggering walk. He seemed to see Signor Bellotti's sarcastic smile through a mist, but knew that the sky above was already intensely blue and quivering with heat. Once more it occurred to Stephen that it was hard for him to leave this beautiful world, and that he hoped he should not look too hideous in death. He would have liked to have given orders that his body should be buried in the quiet English cemetery where the violets grew so beautifully in the early spring; where the morning sunshine fell on the grave of Keats, and the brilliancy of the sunset tints shone through the cypress trees beneath the shade of which they had buried Shelley's heart. But he knew that that would be impossible; that the beautiful English service could never be read over his

remains, and his fate must be that of an outcast—a suicide.

Colville would have been strong enough to evade this duel, and to answer that to demand satisfaction from an Englishman was ridiculous, since you could not force a man against his convictions to become a red-handed homicide. It was the last thought which flashed through his brain, as, with a purpose which he tried to make deliberate in spite of his trembling hands, he shot—but not at his adversary.

In another moment there was a noise as of thunder in his ears, and he was lying on the grass wet with his own blood.

“The poor fellow brought it on himself, and he was dead drunk,” he heard one of his seconds murmuring as he knelt pityingly over him.

And then everything was blotted out in merciful unconsciousness.

CHAPTER III.

FILOMENA NURSES STEPHEN.

ONE train of vivid associations has almost always the power of shutting out another; and Norman Colville had felt at his ease about Stephen lately, so much so that no news from him seemed to be good news; and he had not made himself at all uncomfortable when the correspondence seemed to flag.

“That was just what I should have expected,” he said to himself. “Most men of Stephen’s age, if they had been half as busy at their work, would content themselves with scribbling on post-cards, or wiring in emergencies.”

But now that he had left Melton Hall with its exciting associations, he suddenly remembered that it was most unwise for Stephen to be lingering at Rome.

"It would be unwise for any one; but now that the hot season has set in, it is downright madness for him," he could not help acknowledging, as he made haste to reach him, with the hope of carrying him off at once to some more salubrious climate.

Then there was Filomena. He thought it a little odd that so much time should have elapsed since he had heard anything about the girl.

It was certainly the best prescription for himself to forget his own worries by losing himself in those of others. And it was not without some self-reproach that he remembered how little he had written to Stephen lately.

With the shrinking shyness of most Englishmen, he would willingly have avoided all his old friends, had he been less unselfish, from the fear of betraying the strong emotion from which he was still suffering, and which made him more absent in his manner than usual. Absence of mind had never hitherto been one of his faults; and as soon as he got into the train for Dover, and began the usual, rather

wearying, journey, he found that there was plenty for him to do. He wondered how often he had busied himself before in carrying parcels and bags for women who had been sea sick, or how often he had had to coach up other young men in the intricacies of Bradshaw.

“What a pity I can’t supply Mark Twain with some copy for a new edition of *The Innocents Abroad*, he thought, his sense of humour generally coming to his assistance and helping him over the most difficult crises of life. He could not help smiling at the sight of his fellow-travellers rushing out for the buffets at Boulogne or Amiens, looking out for their creature comforts, purchasing pillows for their night’s journey, and choosing the cosiest corners irrespective of their neighbours. But he was still more amused when one of his companions on the night’s journey retailed his experiences in Swiss *pensions*. He was a young curate, and he described one of his Sundays abroad as “a wet restful Sunday, with lay services and restoration”.

Norman laughed inwardly as he wondered if he referred to the good meals in the "Restauration". He had a difficulty in keeping himself from laughing outright when the same man lamented his wife's mania for going up the mountains and leaving "poor me!" down in the valleys. He was not only careful of breaking his limbs, but was full of all the newest theories about cholera and choleraic germs, and cried out with horror when he heard that Colville intended going to Rome, though the month of August had commenced.

Colville did not think it necessary to explain that he was going to look after an intimate friend, and that his conscience pricked him for not having seen to this friend before. He grew more and more anxious when some of the other passengers said that the heat had been unusually terrible in Rome.

He could not sleep for thinking of Stephen. "Dear old Steve!" What a queer, imaginative, erratic, irresponsible being he was, and yet how

simple and innocent-minded—as guileless and as little able to take care of himself as a child!

He began to reproach himself for having asked him to look after a girl like Filomena when he was so little able to look after himself. He thought tenderly of him—of his genius and his weaknesses—as he tried to sleep, sitting bolt upright in the crowded second-class carriage. Sleep came to him only in broken snatches; and when the morning dawned, bringing the Jura mountains into view, he was a little puzzled to find that he could not shake off these thoughts about Stephen. Norman was not superstitious. Had he been like his more fanciful friend, he could have imagined that Stephen's voice was calling to him for assistance. Once or twice he had seemed to hear it distinctly. This, of course, was utter rubbish. Still, in spite of his conclusion that it was nonsense, Norman Colville hurried on without breaking his journey to Rome. When he got there, he found that the men who had warned him against going were fully justified in

their worst prognostications. For in the gardens of Rome the flowers were hanging on their stalks, the grass was dried up, and even the sky seemed to burn with a fiery heat ; the pavement scorched one's feet ; and the gusts of air, which were like poisonous kisses, reminded one of the old legends about the breath of a vampire ready to suck the blood. All the colour had gone out of the faces of the men and women, and those who could retire within their houses closed their *persiennes* and shut their doors. In the middle of the day the streets were almost deserted ; whilst every now and again the ear was haunted by the tolling of the bells, and the "Beccamorti," with long mantles and cowls drawn over their faces so that the eyes only could be seen, walked in procession with the bodies of the dead. In the evening they carried torches in their hands, on which death's heads were painted.

Norman hastened to the Via Sistina, vexed with himself because his own breath was coming in quick pants, and he was in a state of unreasonable

excitement till he could see Stephen. When he knocked at the door of the lodgings, the landlady opened it half grudgingly, holding it ajar as if she was afraid of admitting thieves.

“The Holy Virgin protect us!” she cried in a loud strident voice. “We don’t want any more English artists with fevers. We may as well be sending for coffins for all of us next. This is the second time that Signor Dillwyn has brought the malaria to our house, and—the saints help us!—only yesterday a fellow from the Campagna fell dead on the steps of St. Peter’s! Such things are scandalous!” continued the woman, wiping the drops of perspiration from her face. “And I, a mother with a family trying to keep things proper! To have all Rome gossiping about a gentleman who lodges in our house, and the girl who is the cause of the mischief sitting with him at this moment! And scarcely a scudo to bless himself with; so she thinks *she* must nurse him!”

Norman did not wait to hear any more, but

pushed past the woman, leaving her upon the steps, and hastened through the small doorway. The way was so familiar to him that he could have passed blindfolded through the two corridors—with arches to support the plaster roof, which led to the cold damp studio, where his footsteps had so often echoed upon the stones. He thanked Heaven *now* that they were cool even in summer, and that the objection which had been so great against a delicate man like Stephen choosing quarters which were so bitterly cold in the winter, would make it all the easier for him to get through his second illness. For that it *was* a second illness, and that his friend had already an impaired constitution, came vividly into Norman's mind as he knocked at the bedroom door.

He was struck by the sordid poverty of the room. On the whitewashed walls Stephen had hung some of his water-colour sketches, and in the corner stood one of the large classical jugs which could be bought cheaply, filled with dried grasses

from the Campagna. In these touches there was still a feeble attempt at beauty, whilst from the little window which stood open could be seen the deep blue sky palpitating as it were with heat, and the chimney pots and backs of the houses. Stephen lay on the iron bedstead, with his face turned to the wall. The hands which were on the coverlet were emaciated, and the arm that was still in splints had evidently been broken. Colville feared, when he first of all looked at him, that he was already dead, so sallow and corpse-like was that portion of the profile which was all that he could see.

The hair was tangled and matted, and the beard had grown. He had evidently been ill nursed; and as Colville glanced at Filomena, who sat on a chair by his side with her thick brows drawn together, and an angry defiant look upon her face, he could not help asking: "Why didn't you send for assistance?"

Then Filomena's wrath burst out. He had

fought the duel for her sake, and it was not her fault that he had got her name into disrepute. Everybody had said that the least she could do was to see to the gentleman who had risked his life for her. Then they had all turned round upon her, even her own mother. It had injured her career ; it had prevented her from practising ; she had thrown up her evening engagement, and should find it difficult to get another. Had Mr. Colville left his address with her, as any other gentleman would have done, she would have been able to communicate with him direct ; but though she had rummaged amongst Mr. Dillwyn's papers she had been unable to find it.

At another time Norman would have smiled. The girl was vociferating like a Mrs. Siddons in rags ; and in spite of her grossly disfiguring dress, and the absence of all those delicate toilet inventions which he knew that Filomena valued, and which could only be purchased by money, she had never looked handsomer. But he understood

that she was desperately angry ; for she was one of those girls who could not live without perpetual excitement, and this exile to Stephen's room must have been intolerably irksome to her.

He was far from condemning her, as he looked at her with a benevolent smile, experiencing for the first moment nothing but the intense relief of finding that Stephen had not been seriously injured, and that his friend was only sleeping when he had first supposed him to be dead.

"I think you made a mistake," he said, speaking in a low voice so as not to startle Stephen ; "but you meant well : you have a good heart, and we must take care that you are not allowed to suffer from the consequence of your mistake."

There was a sudden revulsion of feeling. The girl, who never subdued her feelings, was trembling violently, and trying to swallow the great lump which rose in her throat.

"*Dio mio !*" she cried in her quick curt way. "If

every one in the world were like *you*, it wouldn't be such a hell to live in!"

He never saw the hungry yearning look in the big dark eyes which she fixed on his, nor could he guess that—coarse as her instincts were—she had quick perceptions as well as spontaneity of language, and had imagined she had seen something noble and subtle about him which had taken her fancy. He tried not to look again at the woman, who was standing with arms extended, whose half-combed hair was falling in dusky masses round her face, and whose eyes were shining like stars. But some instinct told him that it would be necessary to snub her effusiveness.

"We shall not need you any longer, and I will see that your services are properly repaid. You must excuse me," he added, trying to speak with decision, "but all my experiences have warned me against amateur nursing. I blamed myself before for nursing my friend unaided—there is really no occasion for it when so many are properly trained."

Her eyes were still devouring him, but his unexpected dignity made her wince. Hitherto she had imagined that there were possibilities about this hero, who had paid for her singing lessons and made her his *protégée*. But her quick perceptions told her that something had happened during his absence that had infinitely diminished those possibilities, and placed him on a higher platform more remote from herself. She was so taken by surprise that she had no thought of disobeying him, but began pinning a cheap and tawdry hat over her untidy hair, and struggling to keep her temper within decent bounds.

"I will come to see you later, as soon as I can leave the patient," he said, still speaking in a voice carefully modulated so as not to disturb the sleeper; "we are both of us very much obliged to you, but I am sure your mother will agree with me that it will be best under the circumstances for me to get a Sister."

He followed her into the passage, where he could

speak in tones which were rather louder, leaving the door carefully ajar, whilst he informed himself more exactly about the disaster that had happened to Stephen.

Filomena could only repeat the gossip she had heard. It was supposed that Count Bellotti—influenced by the strong opinion expressed by all the men who had known and valued Stephen amongst the art circles in the city—had become ashamed of his conduct. And that finding when the young man appeared that he had incapacitated himself—as it was supposed—for fighting by drink, and that when the fatal moment came he could only shoot aimlessly, he had determined to injure him as little as possible.

He could easily have killed his man ; but it was discovered when the doctor arrived that he had only broken his arm, whilst the ball which had grazed the ribs had not done much further mischief.

Norman returned to the room on tiptoe as

Stephen was already awake. His eyes were opened widely, gazing at something upon the wall, and for some moments he did not see his friend, who was alarmed—as he had been once before—at the strained expression on his face. Next he tried to get out of bed, and would have done so at one bound had not Colville grappled with him, preventing him with all his strength. Then slowly, as Stephen looked at him, a strange expression came into the sick man's face, like that of one recovering his power of vision. He went on trembling; but he seized Colville's hands and clung to him almost like a child as he said: "Dear old chap! I knew you would come! It will be all right now, but I wanted to get rid of that girl. There was only one good in having her,—that she kept away the others!"

"What others?" cried Colville, bursting into a hearty laugh, and thinking it best to tackle the nonsense at once. "Do you mean to say that the Vestal Virgin has come to life again? Now that

must be dealt with at once. I have heard of one resurrection, but never of two."

"Old man!" answered the invalid as he looked apprehensively around him, "you have always been so good that you must take care—be sure you take care. They have been following me as they followed me before, and will certainly follow *you* if you mix yourself up any more with me and my affairs."

Norman was merrier than ever as he busied himself with arranging the bottles and tidying the sick room so that the neat little Sister of Mercy to whom he had sent a message should not see things quite so disreputable when she arrived.

"Do you mean to say you have raised another? Well, that beats anything! I always knew that you were a bit of a genius, but you are cleverer than I imagined. We shall have to exhibit you."

Stephen could have borne a solemn argument upon the subject, and was ready enough to tell Colville that he had worked it all out in his own

mind, and had come to the conclusion that not only artists, but authors as well, were followed by invisible pursuers. He felt too weak to enlarge on this original idea, and began to be a little doubtful as to whether it might be wise for him to risk injuring his reputation by sending a paper to the Psychical Society, describing how Becky Sharpe (then inhabiting the world of spirits) stood at Thackeray's elbow and whispered all her clever speeches in his ear; and how Little Dombey and *Oliver Twist* supplied Dickens in the same obliging way with copy.

The whole theory had seemed to hold very well together when he had lain upon his bed with his face turned to the wall that he might hide it from Filomena; but the first sight of Norman's cheery face had made him doubtful about how it would go down with the public; and, as he did not like to be chaffed, he thought it better to say no more about it.

He changed his mind when the evening shades

gathered in the room, and when the faint light of the small paraffin lamp seemed feebly to illuminate the dark corners of the room. He then started up as usual, fancying that he heard footsteps in the big studio underneath. And as the Sister with her placid face took everything as a matter of course, he confided to her his dread of the Pompeian wine-seller. The Sister tried to calm him by shaking her head, and sitting closely by his side as she gently stroked the hair from his forehead. And as she did not seem to think the story at all impossible, but suggested that she should hold up the crucifix and read a few prayers to exorcise the *revenants* who were tormenting him, they got on exceedingly well together.

Norman was almost puzzled when he peeped in a few hours afterwards and found the invalid quietly sleeping, his moist hand still held in the Sister's dimpled palm.

"His temperature has already gone down a good deal, and sleep is the best thing for him," she said,

holding up a warning finger at Colville, who smiled, and whispered back :—

“The doctors say that we must move him as quickly as possible. Tivoli will be far enough for the present; but if he gets on at this rate, we shall be able to start in a day or two.”

And then Norman, who was always ready to reproach himself for slips and omissions in the smallest social duties, went in search of the *café chantant*, which Filomena and her friends dignified by the name of theatre, and where her mother had told him she would be certain to go that evening, with the hope of being engaged again as quickly as possible. He lingered on the way. The spectacle of the world was always amusing and interesting to him, and though it was not many months since he had left Italy he felt inclined to do nothing but gaze at the old sights. The swirl of the yellow Tiber, lit up by the lamps already burning on the bridges, the market people going home with their baskets of fruit and piled-up flowers, and the quiet

stars taking their places like sentinels watching over the city—messengers sent from God alike to the richest pleasure-seekers and the dwellers in the foulest slums—all combined to complete the picture.

But he was anxious about Filomena, even more anxious than about Stephen. Stephen was likely to make a good recovery. The doctor had told him so that day ; but it would not be so easy to extricate the Italian girl from the muddle which she had so unnecessarily made of her life. He would have to remonstrate with her and tell her not to go near his sick friend, who resented her intrusion and became worse when her name was mentioned. But Norman, who possessed an extraordinary faculty for seeing everything in a favourable light, felt as if he should have to reproach himself for acting rather like a cad, and for saying hard things to a woman who had been guilty of nothing but self-sacrificing imprudence.

He felt the more uncomfortable when the sham

smartness of the Roman tavern, with its unnecessary amount of plate glass, artificial flowers and red velvet chairs, burst upon him in its unvarnished vulgarity. He was asked to sit down in one of the red velvet chairs, with little shrouds of artificial lace over their backs, ranged all at equal distances, in which the men were expected to recline and smoke while they applauded or hissed the singers.

Filomena was not singing. The girl looked for once a little frightened as she stood in the doorway, her figure huddled rather than erect, her magnificent eyes staring defiantly at the men, some of whom had not seen her for a little time, and who were crowding round her to pay her the usual coarse compliments. She wore the one dress which she kept for these occasions.

It was *decolletée* and cut lower than was necessary. He thought it in bad taste, and that it was still worse taste for the men to stare at her unabashed. He had that fine feeling about a woman's beauty which compelled him to look away as if she were

sacred, as Filomena afterwards scornfully declared, when perhaps she would rather have had his eyes dwell upon her. But in one moment he had seen the gleaming of her arms and neck, and the sudden impression of her Cleopatra-like attractions had flashed upon him.

He remembered that she was more or less dependent upon her surroundings, and immediately concluded that it was his duty to get her better placed. During the next few days he called and wrote continually to various agents, and did not think it necessary, when he at last succeeded in finding a better engagement for Filomena, to inform her that he had spent a considerable sum of money.

She might indeed have guessed it, the pressure being so great that it was impossible to obtain employment without interest; but her vanity so completely blinded her that she took it as a matter of course, with few thanks to Colville.

CHAPTER IV.

AT TIVOLI.

IT was well indeed that Norman's pocket was plentifully lined with the money he had received from Lord Melton, for he needed it all at this crisis. In the course of a few days they were able to move Stephen in the early morning, before the heat of the day or the mists of the evening had set in. It was pleasant to watch his delight as they set out over the Campagna with the distant view of Rome; the great dome designed by Michael Angelo, and the Basilica of S. Paolo fuori le Mura in the distance, and the Alban Mount sloping down in pearly greys.

They had taken lodgings at Tivoli; and Norman was a little disgusted at himself to find that the simple accommodation, with rush chairs out of

repair, stone floors, and rude doorways, seemed strange to him after the luxurious living at Melton Hall. But the weather was so beautiful that they spent most of their time out of doors, carrying their luncheon with them and picnicking beneath the trees. Both the men were determined to take a perfect holiday, and they compared themselves to a couple of lazy butterflies flitting about in the open air. They often made excursions to Hadrian's Villa, enjoying the beautiful drive, and finding shade in the midday sunshine beneath the thick cypresses and ilexes in the garden.

Here, lying on the grass, with no sound to interrupt his confidences but the buzz of happy insects and the merry click of locusts' wings, Stephen first of all forced himself to tell Norman about the duel.

"You see you were quite wrong to take it in that way. I did not require any one to fight my battles; but you are no more cowardly than other people. It is your fancy," said his friend.

"I am sorry to say I can't agree with you. I

valued life, and I felt like a spark that might be blown out without knowing the reason why," answered Stephen, beginning to recite in his rich, musical, tenor voice :—

“ Into this universe, and why not knowing,
Nor whence, like water willy-nilly flowing ;
And out of it, as wind along the waste,
I know not whither, willy-nilly blowing ”.

And this uncertainty of Omar Khayyam's seemed to remind him of a ghastly suggestion of Clough's ; and he asked Norman if he thought it possible that by the operation of natural laws through ages and ages the same things might repeat themselves and the recurrence of a cycle be inevitable.

“ Fancy ! ” he cried, with his eyes fixed upon the leaf shadows dancing on the blades of grass ; “ at that rate I might have had some chance of fighting a duel with Signor Bellotti over again, of exhibiting my picture at the same identical New Gallery, cycles hence ! Again you would come rushing to Rome

to help me, and again we should be lying under these trees !”

And then once more in his resonant voice he quoted :—

“ It may be that no life is found,
Which, only to one engine bound,
Falls off, but circles always round ”.

Norman raised himself on one elbow and looked at him curiously. He was silent for a minute or two. Then he said : “ Dear old boy, will you be offended if I tell you what I think ? ”

“ Why should I ? ” answered Stephen, with rather an awkward laugh. “ You were always rather given to speaking the ‘ malignant truth ’ . ”

“ Was I ? I suppose most men are prigs in boyhood ; and now when I look back upon myself when I was at Oxford I am sometimes afraid I was a horrible prig. ”

“ No, you were not ; I did not know you then, but I am sure you were not. I did not mean *that*, ” cried Stephen, in hasty disclaimer.

"I was in a transition state—tadpoles are horrid things."

"Frogs are worse," retorted Stephen.

"Let us admit that the change is for the worse," said Norman, beating about the bush to see how much plain speaking his friend could bear. Then he burst out: "You are an innocent—you will never realise the continental conception, nor how thoroughly the whole thing is—*bosh!* Why, if you had applied to head-quarters you would have heard no more about your challenge, you foolish child!"

Stephen coloured as he continued:—

"Englishmen don't fight duels. All that is out of date."

"It only makes a ridiculous paragraph for the newspapers," he felt inclined to add, but kept silence.

It would not do for Stephen to guess that the form of castigation which he had accepted in order to screen himself from the odium of cowardice had

only exposed him to the very ridicule he hated and which could easily have been avoided. He would feel rather small when he began to understand that all his tremors and agitations had been for nothing, that the intention of his olive-faced antagonist had probably been from the beginning to punish him by drawing as little blood as possible, and that it would have been the greatest mistake for him to kill him.

Duelling reduced to these dimensions was no longer formidable ; it was outrageous nonsense. Looked at in this light the lesson the young man had received was almost as direct an insult as a horsewhipping would have been in England.

No ; it would be better for the present to leave these things unsaid, and Norman contented himself with remarking : " I was going to observe that if I were your doctor I would burn all your poetry till you were in a healthier state of mind and body. You have been a smug. The consequence is that not only is your body out of order, but your

mind is suffering with your body. You ought to have a course of football—I don't know how we are to get it here."

"Perhaps we might hire a boxing kangaroo?"

"When you are strong enough, that might be a good idea, though a trifle more expensive to import than football; at present the boxing kangaroo would knock you down in the first round—he would be the healthier animal of the two," said Norman, as he sat upright and surveyed his friend critically. "It all hangs together; had you been in a sounder state of physical health the other day, you would have allowed that bullying Italian to take the initiative without thinking yourself obliged to follow his lead. I will say no more," he added in a softer tone. "You know how I hate a sing-song phraseology and a cheap way of talking about the most sacred subjects; but Steve, old boy—though I would guard against the pleasurable attraction of toying with emotional feelings—and a Credo is of no use to a man without action—still,"

and here he placed one hand on his friend's shoulder, while with the other he raised his hat, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and that we two shall stand one day before His throne, to give an account of the lives which we received from Him. That consideration alone should have kept you from trifling with this nonsensical duel."

He got up and walked a few steps away, to recover his usual easy manner, and then he began to jeer at himself upon some other unimportant matter.

His personality was not only attractive to the weaker man whenever the latter happened to come within its radius, but his courage seemed to communicate itself in some telepathic way to him. Stephen found himself wondering at his own nervous and morbid fears.

The æsthetic delights which they shared in common made it easier for Stephen to acknowledge on another occasion when they had come home tired from a walk.

“Don’t call me a conceited egoist, but I should like to feel that I had lived, that I had had my day, and had tasted just a little of the pleasures of success; *that* is what grieved me most when I feared to die.”

“I am afraid very few of us can hope to live in that sense. There are too many on the ant-heap, all fussing and trampling on one another. Who was it who said that in ancient times great men were great units in themselves; *now* they are only units of great nations?”

“One would think you had ceased to take any interest in my making my mark,—that would not be like *you*,” said the invalid, a little petulantly. “Oh, by-the-bye, you haven’t seen my criticisms.”

And he surprised Colville by rushing to his portmanteau. It was his fashion never entirely to unpack, rummaging in its corners for anything that he particularly wanted. He was on his knees before it now, poking with assiduity. Presently

he emerged with a portfolio in which, in contrast with his usual untidy habits, newspaper cuttings had been carefully pasted in, and chronologically arranged with accurate dates.

He gave them to Norman to read.

"The last time I saw you, you spoke of criticism as a 'deadening blight,'" said the latter, after he had plodded through a number of them with an expression of bewilderment struggling with humorous geniality on his face; "and if I remember rightly, you expressed your utter disapproval of critics being allowed to display their imbecility on subjects on which they knew nothing at all."

"Oh, that was different."

"Ah, I see, they hadn't discovered *you*. Critics often follow each other like a flock of sheep. Don't think I mean to speak against a most valuable institution! They are only like other men in feeling that nothing succeeds like success. If they are the men who have failed, it stands to reason that no men can be better fitted for pointing out

the stumbling stones ; and if they are boys, as George Eliot said, nothing can be better for keeping the older folk in touch with the next generation. Still, it cannot matter so very much,—you and Filomena are too ambitious !”

Stephen was sulky. It was provoking that political success or personal fame should mean so little to Norman. He vented his spleen on Filomena. Filomena was not only a woman, but he had had enough of her.

“Women have been created for but two things : to love and to be loved, and to be the mother of children ; you can’t compare their ambitions with ours,” he was heard to mutter to himself.

And when Norman laughed and told him he was ungallant, he shifted his ground and laid the blame on Prudhomme. “It was Prudhomme who said so. Depend upon it he was right. And yet these women *will* be ambitious.”

Norman still shook his sides with inward laughter, but grew more grave when he found

that Stephen was bitter in his indictments against his *protégée*.

"She is a wonderful woman; her genius is great," he remonstrated.

"If she could give up that awful tremolo; it is a dreadful trick with the Italian, and, once formed, the habit is almost hopeless," retorted the artist.

But Colville was not thinking at that moment about the singer: he had fallen into a reverie about the *woman*, and the rather cruel things which Stephen had said about her. He felt as if he would do much to rescue her; the possibility of reformation was great.

Never was a girl more inclined to rebel against narrowing influences than she; and in some respects he agreed with her. But he wished she had not taken to writing to him, now that he was no longer able to make a secret of his address. He was beginning to feel the horrible inconvenience of her letters. It was not his habit to allow himself to be drawn into discussing his friends;

and Stephen's condition made it impossible for him to put him on his guard, as yet, against the imputations that Filomena was making. If that was her cue, Stephen must be protected from her.

For he was still rather unhappy about the state of Stephen's health. The quieting influences of the softening air, and the long drives in the early morning and evening to and from Hadrian's Garden, seemed to have a magical power in soothing his nerves. But after a time he tired of Tivoli, and complained of the noise of the waterfall, which seemed to have a strange effect upon his nervous system.

"It seems to be always in a passion, always hissing and crashing about nothing. Why can't it be content without putting itself into such a state of contortion and rage when it ought to know, in spite of everything, that it must be hurled over the rapids, to find itself in a state of torpid exhaustion at the end?"

It was on the tip of Norman's tongue to answer : " Just like us mortals in our momentary excitement about what we call our ambitions, especially in this fussy, agitated century, when it seems after all as if we can do nothing. Youth begins with all this clamour to succumb into monotonous middle age." But he checked himself, remembering that in Stephen's present state a little ambition might be good for him, and said instead : " It seems as if it must pass through the churning and foaming process before it settles itself into the calm acquiescence of good-humoured old age".

" If only it would not make such a horrid din about it!" rejoined Stephen irritably. " I feel as if I can never escape from it, and should like to imitate Herbert Spencer, and put some guttapercha contrivances into my ears. If only one could screw up courage to write to the great man and ask him how he does it! I am told it is to escape from the twaddle of his fellow-creatures."

On the following day he complained more bitterly

of the noise, declaring that voices were calling to him from the water ; and that sometimes he seemed to hear strange Wagner-like melodies which he did not at all enjoy, as for *his* part he thought that Wagner's music was immoral—it always made him feel wicked.

“We can't let things go on like this—we shall have to change our apartments,” thought Norman, as he found that the old nightmare horrors were coming again upon his friend.

“It will be better to employ him, though he looks hardly strong enough to hold a brush,” he said to himself, as Stephen began to make a mystery of his new dreams, and only to give him broken hints about demoniacal hands stretched out to draw him into an abyss.

So the two began to sketch once more, finding plenty of subjects in the beautiful woods and still more beautiful ruins embroidered by lichens and moss-stains beneath the deep shades of the cypress trees.

And they began again to discuss Art, and to quarrel about middle distances, or the best way of giving that touch of the spiritual to Nature which informs its physical beauty with life.

But there was no more illusion for Norman Colville. He could criticise his own performances, laugh at them, and feel the weakness of them. He was sensitively alive to all the poetry in the atmospheric effects floating ghost-like over the weird grey sea of the Campagna, but he could not render it.

"I shall never be anything but a second-rate amateur. I began too late," he would repeat, shaking his head. "My water and my trees get considerably mixed, and my skies are horribly suggestive of Reckitt's blue. The crude mixture of greens and yellows in which I have tried to render the autumn tints sets my own teeth on edge. It makes one blink to look at them. I am convinced that if one of my pictures could be hung on the walls of the Academy, even the lady specta-

tors at the private view would save themselves by flight, in spite of their desire to exhibit their new spring toilets. But *you* have accomplished a *tour de force* in keying up the colour ; your canvas is palpitating with the white glittering sunshine of the South. So far, so good."

Stephen took the praise as his due, and merely remarked : " It is because you have no ambition ".

If Colville had answered truly he would have retorted : " Because I have lost my heart for the work ".

And Stephen, looking at him wonderingly, said : " Old chap, you are not at all like yourself ".

Although it was possible for him to hide that he had a continual dull ache in his heart, and though he had determined to yield as little as possible to the daily, hourly struggle to which a weaker man would have given way, he was unable to radiate happiness as in the earlier days before he met Althea ; and that vitality which he had once been able to communicate to others, making them rejoice in the

very fact of existence, seemed so entirely to have disappeared that he could hardly believe it could ever have been his.

He was afraid of boring Stephen ; for in his delicately strung state Stephen was easily bored, and expected a brilliancy of conversational power from him which he no longer possessed.

He determined not to leave him, though Filomena's letters had become imperative.

She had quarrelled with the conductor of the opera, who had insisted on her performing parts of "Il Trovatore," with which the *débutante* was not content. There seemed to be daily hitches and frictions between them ; and it was quite on the cards that, in spite of the contract being signed, the angry *impresario* might dismiss her. In that case he would have to pay heavy damages ; but he had written to Norman Colville to declare that he was willing to encounter that risk rather than to subject himself to fresh outbursts of the young lady's temper.

"She is the very devil," the man had allowed himself to say in his discomfiture, describing how, in a fit of angry jealousy, she had on one night torn off the dress which had just been sent her by the *costumier*, declaring that it did not become her, and that she refused to act in it; and how a mezzo-soprano, with a very inferior voice, had been obliged, at the last moment, to take Filomena's part.

There was only one ray of comfort to be got out of this letter. The conductor had agreed with Mr. Colville in declaring that Filomena had a very rare voice—an organ of great compass and power, which, he had added, "if she used it intelligently, ought to bring her a fortune". And though he had said that the *débutante* had many faults, he evidently considered that her *début* had been fairly successful, and might foreshadow a good career. Filomena herself had been on very high stilts when she had written her own account of the affair. In complete ignorance of the fact that Colville had had to pay her expenses, and provide her costumes, she had

mocked at the state of the opera, and complained bitterly of her dresses. It was a bad one, she said, with the chorus too small, the other singers inefficient, and the whole affair likely to be a fiasco, unless her own singing redeemed it.

It was impossible for Norman to judge between the two accounts; but with the continual suffering to be combated in his own heart, he felt just now more intensely for others; and the spectacle of the world, which had often been such an amusing one, was now associated with so much unnecessary pain that he was continually devising new methods for relieving it. It seemed to him very hard that a girl who had to work for her own living should incur so much jealousy on account of her exceptional voice, and harder still that others should be able to twit her for the bad habit she had contracted by using that voice too early, and straining it with child-like inexperience. Still, as it was impossible for him to leave Stephen, he contented himself with writing to Filomena that she must make the best of her

bargain. All apprentices, he reminded her, had something to bear from contracts of this sort ; and she must recollect, that at any rate she was given the opportunity of making her appearance before a larger audience. If she had a voice, and the public recognised it, she might be able to accomplish better things by-and-by.

CHAPTER V.

FILOMENA PAYS A VISIT.

NORMAN'S consternation was great when, on returning one day with their sketching blocks and paint boxes from an expedition in the neighbourhood, he and Stephen found the Italian girl waiting in their sitting-room. He had forgotten that the railway from Rome could transport her so quickly as to make it easy for her to visit them and return for her evening engagement.

Her dress was extraordinary. She wore an apology for a bonnet, which was formed by a bunch of artificial flowers ; for, as Stephen said, the girl did not care for natural flowers, and would give them all for scentless ones made of calico, which could impart touches of extra colour to a style of beauty already sufficiently showy.

But although the flowers were artificial, the little room was filled with perfume. Norman hated perfumes, and had a special dislike to patchouli. So when Stephen took care to leave the room after a polite recognition, and Filomena fluttered her ungloved hands about with a view to stating her difficulties, he seized the opportunity of opening the window, before he sat down to listen to her with what his fellow-students had always called his paternal expression of face.

“ Mr. Dillwyn need not go off like that ; he was always imagining that I meant to do the wrong thing, and it is *he* who has got me into scrapes,” cried Filomena, with crude and passionate feeling dyeing her cheeks and brow ; “ but it is not like *you*—you will never think I mean to do the wrong thing, or take a liberty in coming to see you because I am not conventional like your English misses,” she added, tossing her head. “ I came to you to-day because I could not help it, because I was so unhappy, because you have such a kind

face, and because I—I could not bear to be long away from you.”

The pretty mouth, which was a trifle too thick-lipped, though the rich curves and carmine colouring redeemed it from the suspicion of coarseness, began to tremble. Her shoulders were quivering with suppressed emotion ; and her chin, in spite of that something pert and aggressive in its outline which always jarred upon Stephen’s susceptibilities, sank in a hopeless way on her bosom.

“ All the world is against me ; the reason the other singers insult me is because I nursed Mr. Dillwyn when I thought he would die. And he was not in the least grateful,—I believe he hates me,” cried Filomena, her large frame heaving with the effort she made to repress her sobs as she lay back in the depths of the huge basket-lounge which Norman had purchased for Stephen’s comfort.

He, who could never bear to see a woman weep, stood by her, feeling like a brute, because he could

not think of anything suitable to say to comfort her.

Then—accustomed as he was to her changes of mood—he felt a little surprised when she suddenly emerged from the recesses of the chair, and flaring up like dynamite, suddenly cried :—

“But they may concoct what stories about me they please, the public will like me all the same, they shall not put me down. You shall hear me sing and judge for yourself ; you are artistic and a musical critic. It is cruel, it is shameful ; the other women get some of their friends to hiss me ! Yes, you may open your eyes, but I assure you it is true. You English, you are so cold-blooded you can’t tell what tigresses jealousy makes of *some* women ; yet I would almost rather have that than your dull, cold indifference,” she continued, staring at the discomfited Englishman, who did not know how to answer her. Her emotion had chilled him, and she perceived it. She was a consummate actress, though her acting was generally a little overdone.

And as she stared at him with her magnificent eyes, he noticed that her teeth were chattering as if the ice in his veins had got into hers, and she had begun to shiver though the day was so warm.

He tried to speak :—

“I must disclaim the compliment you pay me. I am no musical critic, but Signor Nerilli is, and he writes to me that though you have a rare voice, it should be combined with rare qualities—patience and application. I do not see why you should conclude that the people who hissed you were prompted by jealousy ; your countrymen are fastidious critics—they are said once to have hissed Patti because they declared that she took one of her notes not quite in the right way.”

She would hardly let him finish his speech.

“I *will* succeed,” she exclaimed, stamping her foot to emphasise her determination. “I will—I must—nothing shall prevent me. It is dreadful for you to hint that I might fail.”

And she began to pace the room like an angry lioness.

The sound of her footsteps reached Stephen, who was hiding in his bedroom upstairs, feeling fearful lest she might hunt him out in his retreat; and recognising self-protection as the better part of valour in the case of a man whose doctors assured him that he had a shattered nervous system, he crept down the stairs and out into the garden. Norman, who happened to be looking out of the window just then—endeavouring to protect himself by a sort of natural instinct from the sparks of light that seemed to be emitted from Filomena's blazing orbits—could scarcely conceal his stifled laughter as he saw the invalid creeping amongst the myrtle bushes and bending his back as if it were possible for them to hide him.

Then suddenly catching sight of a mandoline which had been flung down in a corner of the room—not so much because Stephen cared to play it as because he thought it a picturesque

object, and liked to put it into the hands of his models when he painted them—the visitor asked, yielding to a sudden impulse: “Would you like to hear me sing? You always run yourself down, but you *are* a good judge of music. I have heard people say so. Listen to me now. You shall hear how I have improved.” She threw herself into an attitude with her head inclined slightly backwards and a little on one side, as she stood up tuning the mandoline. In another instant the little room was filled with a voice of such rare richness and so much too powerful for it, that it seemed, as Norman afterwards said, as if not a pane of glass could have been left uncracked in the window, had he not fortunately opened it. The choice of her song was disastrous. “*Che faro senza Euridice?*” For though she burst into a wail, the wail was of such stentorian strength that it was likely to break the drums of any sensitive ear; and Norman, who still kept an anxious eye upon Stephen creeping away among the myrtle

bushes, fancied he saw him put up both his hands as if to ward off the powerful sounds even at that distance.

It was impossible not to watch Filomena as she sang. The head was fine; the contours of her figure rounded and graceful, if a little too redundant. She rolled her eyes in every direction, but nothing delicate or bewitching dawned on her face, and there were no subtle gradations of sound. Was she conscious of her own inefficiency? It would have been a thousand times more hopeful if she *had* been conscious of it. But when she stopped breathless and waiting for applause, Norman felt a secret conviction that it was hopeless to do much for her, and that whatever she did she would never go far.

"Well," she panted, as she sat for a minute or two silent, hoping to get time to collect his thoughts. "Well, can't you say something encouraging to a girl who is trying to earn her living by decent means?"

"Struggling, you might say," he answered kindly, not altogether sure from the expression of her face that she was pleased with the amendment. "I am always so sorry for women who have to struggle—the conditions are so much harder for *them* than for men."

He was still seeing her through the glorifying medium of his own benevolent nature; the faults of the singer had disappeared in his sympathy for the girl who had been coarsened in this struggle for her daily bread.

A slight smile had dawned on his face, touching to one of her impressionable nature.

"*Dio!*" she exclaimed, "don't pity me. On the whole, I think, that if you could go on helping me, I should rather like it. It was when *you* were away that the battle was so hard."

He had suffered himself, and cared for all suffering with a supersensitiveness not common in mankind. It was the feeling of pity for her which kept him from seeing the humorous side when she

offered to sing something else for him, and plunged at once, without waiting for an answer, into the passionate love song, "*Robert, toi que j'aime*". He could not help being glad that Stephen was out of the way, and that there was nobody else to witness that performance, though the song suited her better than Gluck's wail after Eurydice.

Now and then it was a *tour de force*, and he felt that it would be better for him to keep to the critical impersonal *rôle*, and to tell her that though there was crudity in her singing, there was power and possibility in it, and that, on the whole, he agreed with her in thinking that it would be a misfortune for her to be restricted to too narrow a sphere.

At the same time he endeavoured to hint that there could be no *great* flights for her. He did not like to say in plain words that he felt she was incapable of them. But Filomena's was a nature ruined by the smallest flattery; she could not swallow the antidote after the sugary poison. Her

whole manner changed, and if he had found it a little difficult to deal with her in her tragic mood, he soon had to acknowledge that it was worse when she was sociable.

He was rather glad when the time came for her to go back to Rome in order to be ready for her evening engagement.

He did not call Stephen, but waited in patience while she drew on the gloves which she had put away in her pocket, and rearranged her apology for a bonnet before the mirror. He accompanied her himself to the station, and heaved a sigh of relief when the whistle began shrieking, the crank turned, and he could watch the little train as it crept away like a serpent in the distance.

Afterwards, when he returned, he was surprised at himself to find that he was hotly taking her part when Stephen ran her down, and shrugged his shoulders at her performances.

"The man who scouts and scorns a woman is not a nice kind of fellow," he said a little angrily.

"The men with whom Filomena is daily brought in contact never trouble themselves if they bring shame and reproach into a girl's life, and take precious good care that they don't commit themselves. But you ought to be kinder."

"You don't understand," retorted Stephen. "You are so easily taken in. This girl has more than her normal share of shrewdness; but she is changeable, dissatisfied, and always wanting to be amused."

"It is a matter of nerves with her, as it is with *you*. She is ambitious, and so are you; you should feel for her."

"Our ambitions are quite different. Hers is poor and limited, it is a commercial business."

Stephen had already a prevision of doom. He knew the vulgar pressure which Filomena and her friends were capable of bringing to bear not only upon himself but upon an unsuspecting man like Colville.

He was sulky with vexation, and irritable in his

convalescence, or he would have remembered the sensitive honour on which the other man prided himself, and would have picked his words more carefully.

"Well, you see," he said, determined to open his eyes, "these Italians think of things quite differently from us. From their point of view you and I have compromised her, and if we act like honourable Englishmen, one or other of us will have to marry her. That's why I don't like her coming after us."

"Nonsense!" answered Norman, as a flush flew to his brow; "you can't expect me to credit *that*."

"It is *not* nonsense, it is gospel truth," persisted Stephen doggedly; "and it is not *my* fault. I was scarcely responsible for the legacy you left me. You saddled me when you went to England with a handsome dare-devil girl, who had a fine capacity for getting herself and other people into scrapes. I risked my life to stand by her."

Norman was silent. He was too generous to retort: "*There* was the ridiculous mistake".

The spell was beginning to work.

"I simply tried to help her to make a respectable living," he said after a pause.

"Well, you had gone pretty far before you left me to take care of her. Nobody could deny that you had shown marked interest in her—doesn't your conscience tell you so?"

Stephen, with his back turned, in his present malicious mood, could not see that Norman was very white as he repeated in a low tone:—

"Heaven help me! Do they say things like that?"

The young fellow did not turn round—he was touching up one of his pictures. But there was passion in his voice as he answered:—

"Of course they do—or why should I have been mixed up in that confounded duel? It won't be any thanks to *you* if the girl doesn't go to the bad. It was all a mistake from beginning to end. She

was innocent enough when you took her in hand, and persuaded the confiding old people to let her be trained for a singer."

Stephen continued his work. He was in a mood to take it out of somebody, and it was natural to him to add :—

"Can't you see that she expects one of us to propose for her, and that is the reason she comes after us?"

He was not of a disposition to make himself uncomfortable for long about any living man or woman, and the recollection of the duel acted as a salve to his own conscience. Whenever his nerves got the better of him he was accustomed to take it out of some one.

But it was his turn to start at the changed tone in his friend's voice, when Norman said after a pause :—

"You have made me more determined than ever to catch the train for Rome. You don't suppose I want to shirk my responsibility in the matter."

Stephen put down his brush. He had forgotten that Norman Colville could not be lumped with other men ; and that in his Quixotic desire to do right, to be correct to a degree, and in his readiness to sacrifice himself to others, he might take an indictment seriously at which the majority of men would only have laughed. This practising on a finer nature might be unscrupulous and cruel ; he had done it in ill-temper because the girl had worried him by "swooping down" upon them as he would have expressed it, and threatening to interfere with the joys of their bachelor retreat ; but he was already beginning to be ashamed of himself. In a moment of terror he had a vision of awful consequences.

"You are too unsophisticated by far," he said, in this terror of reaction. "I was only trying to see how much you would swallow. Of course, it was my chaff." There was a pause of ominous silence, and then Norman answered in that new hoarse tone which he did not understand, as if

some alteration had taken place during the last few minutes in his vocal chord :—

“ You may trust me to do my duty ”.

“ Fiddlesticks about duty ! ” cried Stephen, stammering in his excitement, so anxious was he to make the other man understand that he spoke of what he *knew*, though he repented his ill-timed pleasantry, and that he himself had already experienced the importunity of Filomena’s friends, and was on his guard against their attempts to coerce him into marriage by accusing him of having compromised the girl’s name.

He knew that they would be equally ready to taunt Norman with treating her badly, and compromising her, and was very uncomfortable when his companion told him that he intended to spend that night in Rome for the sake of satisfying himself as to the impression which Filomena was really making upon her audience.

Stephen was right. That visit to Rome was an unfortunate step.

“There is a splendour about her when she sings, but she depends too much upon the vulgarest stage accessories. One can’t imagine her doing without managers, and stage carpenters, or understanding such a thing as a quiet song in an English concert-room. I must get her out of this,” thought Colville as he stood by the doorway squeezed among the sweltering mass of the people who were applauding or hissing at the café concert, some of the men standing up on their seats, and yet apparently divided in their opinion about the singer. “What a life for her to have chosen, and what dangers she must be exposed to! It was *my* fault for trying to help her, and encouraging her about her career.”

It was always Norman’s way to blame himself severely when any of his schemes turned out to be failures. To try to help to make the world ever so little happier and better involved great responsibilities. And as Filomena’s eyes blazed upon her admirers, and he heard her chattering when he

followed her afterwards into a more private room, in her fashion of taking nothing as if it were really serious, with the foolish little arrows of speech with which she attempted to keep the men who were too presuming at arm's length, and which seemed to him as if there was something piquant and touching about them because they were likely to have a contrary effect, he blamed himself unnecessarily.

"I fail in everything I try to do; and if I go on bothering myself like this, I shall be of no use to Stephen either, for both of us will go melancholy mad," he thought, as he returned by train to Tivoli, determining to give as good an account as possible of the affair to his friend, and not to let him take himself to task for taking the first step in what some people might think a dangerous direction.

For once the positions of the two men were reversed, and it was Stephen who felt that he ought to keep a watch over Norman.

"He is much too simple, taking a dusty, thorny weed for a genuine flower," he thought, shaking his

head when he found that his friend was inclined to repeat his journey to Rome.

It was Norman Colville's new hobby, and, as Stephen said, his folly, to consider that it was his duty to take care of the girl. Yet for this reason he followed her.

Alack! it could only end in one way.

When a man like Norman Colville got it into his head that he was making reparation, the question was where he could stop. His fine courtesy to Filomena, the delicate tone which he always adopted to prevent her from feeling the distance between them, which she was not developed enough to be likely ever to feel, made Stephen frantic when he recollected the part he had played in the matter.

CHAPTER VI.

A PROPHECY FULFILLED.

STEPHEN proved to be an apt prophet ; it was too late to be maddened at finding that he could do so little to remedy his mistake.

He felt sick and troubled, but he was useless. The knowledge of his own impotency retarded his recovery, and was increased by the recollection that it would be difficult for him to remonstrate with Norman on his generous instincts, since the same generosity had always been extended towards himself. The additional trouble to which his own impulsiveness had exposed him, had not steeled Colville's heart against him ; apparently he cared for him more than ever since the absurd episode of the duel. But it was that very episode which had made the girl's story public.

Stephen was unreasonably angry with Filomena, never guessing that Norman was not only pleased with her spontaneity, and anxious to see her strive to exert her talent in a better way, but that he was equally anxious to stifle remembrances of another woman, which he had striven conscientiously to erase from his mind. Norman Colville could feel that he had acted honestly and honourably in a difficult crisis, and that the less he dwelt upon it or tried to explain it even to himself the better. He had been in a horrible mess, and had managed to extricate himself from the strait. He had left Melton Hall without allowing himself to communicate in any way with Althea. He was expecting every day to see the entry of her marriage in one of the papers, but he had never speculated on the possibility of her engagement being broken off.

He deserved no praise for the fact that he did not attempt to obtain information about her ; he was not a blackguard, and could not help acting as

he had done. He could not desecrate the name of love, and allow it to become treachery ; neither would he inflict his pain upon others. It had to be borne alone. His bodily strength was great, and this was in his favour ; he took no credit to himself for the fact that his nerves and tissues were in a thoroughly healthy condition, and not likely to get out of order like Stephen's. But the futility of trying to take an interest in his own concerns at this crisis drove him to the opposite extreme of forgetting that he was human, and that he owed something to his own humanity.

There was nothing definitely planned. He did not even allow himself to dwell on the rather sickening thought that it would be better for him to erect a barrier, which should be no flimsy dam but a firm and solid outwork, between himself and another man's wife.

He was too healthy minded a man to put such a consideration before him in black and white without seeing the falseness of the logic.

But when one evening he was drawn—as Stephen had been expecting—into the net so skilfully laid for him, he tried to comfort himself by the thought that not only should he be assisting a girl who really needed help, but should be placing a definite obstacle between himself and any thoughts about Lady Melton. It happened in this wise. One night Filomena sent for him, telling him that she must refuse to act any more at the *câfe* since an Italian, whose manner had been more insulting than the rest, insisted on waiting for her every evening when the performance was over. Her mother was too much occupied with the children to be able to accompany her. Her fellow-countryman said bad things to her; all his imputations being more or less founded upon the cruel and false tales circulated after the duel that had been so unfortunately fought about her. Then she suddenly melted into tears: “You could help me if you pleased, you are always so good”.

The tears were becoming to her, and they were

not excessive. She was looking far more charming than usual in her simple lodgings, freed from the strange phantasmagoria of her former surroundings, as if she were restored and in her right mind. And Norman, kindly and benignant, noticed the change with pleasure.

All her foreign ideas were contrary to his ways of thinking ; and he, measuring her confidences by his own standard, and judging of the emotions of others by his own, lost his presence of mind, as perhaps she had guessed that he would lose it.

"I know of but one way of helping you," he cried, taking her hand in his ; "be my wife, next month—next week—and you will have some one to take care of you."

There was a momentary revulsion of feeling, in which her better instincts prevailed.

"*C'est une plaisanterie,*" she faltered, in the broken French which she had picked up from some of the other students at Milan.

And there was a sudden softening which rounded

all the outlines of her face, as she pulled her hand away from him, declaring, as if a new sort of fear had taken possession of her: "You don't know what you ask. I am a barbarian, a monster".

"She is right and you are wrong; you think to tame her and to mould her, but you could never be made to understand all that would be nauseous in the process," Stephen would have said if he could have known how greatly his friend was touched by, what he supposed to be, the modesty of the young and untaught girl.

What he did say was: "You are all wrong about her. You two can no more mix than oil can mix with water." And then leaning back in his chair he began to laugh. "You think that what has happened can give you a sense of mutual helpfulness and sympathy—that is the funny thing; the hankering after what you cultured modern folks call sympathy doesn't come within her beat—how can she understand it?"

Norman was not unnaturally offended.

"I found her breaking her heart," he said ; "and I hope, at least, to keep her from breaking it."

"That is all very well," reasoned Stephen, relaxing into gravity ; "but you may break your own instead. I do not believe in the possibility of breaking her's. That a man should go through a thing like this as a duty is simply incomprehensible to me."

"You are hard and unfair to her ; you do not know how the poor girl has suffered from the insults of these brutes ; she almost fainted when she saw me and had to tell me her tale—*fainted*, I tell you, from sheer emotion."

"She is an actress,—it is a part of her stock in trade to faint," grumbled Stephen, in such a tone that Colville could not hear him. Aloud he said :—

"I warn you that I shall take such steps as I can to prevent it while there is time. Great Heavens ! what can you have in common ? You draw your feelings even in art matters from inexhaustible depths ; you like to appeal to something more than sense, rousing spiritual emotion,—and *she*—she has

no idea that such faculties exist. It is not for great emotions, but for the shops in the Corso and the Via Condotti that she cares."

Presently he added as if in desperation, playing his ace of trumps: "You know there are all sorts of anecdotes about her?"

"Yes," was the quiet rejoinder; "and some are to her advantage."

"Some are very much the other way."

"Those I don't believe. Not a tithe of them are true. Even if they *were*, there are sinners whose hearts are in the right places and whose motives are purer than those of the Pharisees."

"You are incorrigible; you could never be made to listen to what the world says."

"As if any one in his senses could attach importance to what the world says."

Stephen gave it up as hopeless. It seemed to him like a childish weakness, not consistent with the character of a man like Colville. It was the first time he had detected a weakness in the

character, and after all it made the Quixote a little more human.

Norman still guarded his secret faithfully. Stephen was never to know how the iron had entered his friend's soul, and how he hoped to cure his own ache by devoting his life to a woman who needed some one to take care of her, and who was misunderstood, reckless and unhappy.

There were no wild dreams of happiness for himself, but if he was ever tempted to think of that as hard, he pulled himself up and reminded himself of the pleasure of making others happy. Yet his face was not as radiant nor his tone as cheery as it had been in past days ; and Stephen wondered a little when he acknowledged with a sigh :

"Yes, I feel as if I had aged, and that is one thing I look forward to in my marriage. Filomena has enough energy for two or three people. Life is difficult at best ; I have never found it very easy. But one has to live one's life ; it would be cowardly to shut oneself up. I was once in favour of

bachelorhood," he said with one of his old smiles ; "but you and I, dear old chap, might have fallen out like the best-intentioned people, if we had grown into a couple of selfish old curmudgeons together. And then one fine day you would have given me the slip, and the girl you 'left behind you ' would have turned up and claimed you. No ; each one of us has one's own duties as a citizen, and it is cowardly to try to escape them. To plant a tree, to guard a woman, or to rear a child will be to feel that one has accomplished something when one is called upon to solve the great enigma."

Stephen reddened, and then bent lower over his work. His friend had drawn a bow at a venture, but there had been just a little place between the joints of his armour where the arrow struck home ; and Stephen began to meditate a journey to England, where the dear old mother was pathetic in her loneliness and the girl who had waited so patiently had been almost forgotten by him.

They neither of them ever forgot those last few days at Tivoli.

The scenery in the autumn sunshine was a perfect miracle of loveliness, and as both of them really possessed the artist's gift of accentuating beauty and trying to make others see it, both of them could enjoy it to the uttermost. In such a friendship as theirs there was not need for much speech. Each was in perfect accord with the other as they sat motionless for hours, with a light in their eyes, before their sketching easels, their pigments helping them to translate.

Then as the shadows altered, each shot at the other an interrogative glance—a quick searching glance, which was meant to ask if there was time to go on with another sketch elsewhere. It would have been curious to outsiders to notice how they had learned intuitively to read each other's thoughts, and to question and answer each other rapidly with responsive eyes.

As each October day wore on and brought them

nearer to the wedding, which had been fixed to take place exactly a month after the evening when Colville had spoken to Filomena, they said less and less about their future lives, and contented themselves with discussing their impressions about landscape scenery.

Whenever they wanted to speak they found quite enough to talk about in discussing the fussy, fretful waterfall, with the silvery lacework, like glistening sheen, thrown over the massive rocks here and there where the volume of water was thinner ; the possible sites of the ancient villas, and the certainty that Horace and his friends could never have had nerves, or they would not have chosen to live near that perpetually wrangling cataract ; or the human element which must always attach to even the smallest fragments of ancient buildings, to the temples where people had worshipped, and the houses where they had rejoiced and suffered.

Then there were the trees which were like old

ladies coquettishly concealing their ages and still pretending to be young, though the battered stone-pines could not hide their clawlike roots still clinging to the earth with fantastic touch, and the olives which with contorted branches made a desperate effort to keep from falling.

Ah, there was quite enough to talk about—if it were only to contrast the flowing pastures, so different from our English fields, cut into check-boards by numerous hedges, or the fiery carmines and brilliant oranges of the sunsets with the mother of pearl or dappled grey of an English sky and its opal and amethyst tints at evening. And yet for the first time each was conscious that a new and deadening reserve, depressing in its effect, had already come between them, and that Norman was entering on another phase of life, with a feeling which, with all his readiness for sympathy, must estrange him from Stephen.

It was as if he acknowledged it, when holding the young artist's slender fingers in his stronger and

more masculine hands, and with a grasp that almost hurt them he said, with a suspicion of moisture in his eyes :—

“Good-bye, dear old boy, you and I will be always in different sets. You will go to England and they will lionise you ; take care that you don’t make your throat sore with the roaring, you know your larynx was always terribly weak, and you can’t have me to nurse you now,—you must ‘roar them like a sucking pig’.”

CHAPTER VII.

AT LA SCALA.

THE winter was nearly over in Milan. The Colvilles had spent it as a good many English people are condemned to spend their time—like modern peripatetics, condemned to economical meannesses, and compelled to live abroad in cheap *pensions*. Norman hated the life and the sort of people with whom it brought him in contact, though he delighted in the city. Milan might be modernised with its tramways and electric lights ; but its four noble picture galleries, its Raphaels and Mantegnas, its Luinis and Borgognones, its treasures of architecture, and its marvellous old world churches, gave him enough to study for months together. He seldom went out for a stroll without lighting unawares on some rare gem or unexpected corner.

Nevertheless, he would have preferred a tiny lodging in a back street, where his wife could have cooked their modest meals, or, failing this, they could have had recourse to restaurants. But Filomena did not see it. She shrugged her shoulders, and said that, as she had married a gentleman, she meant to live like a lady. And when her husband pointed out that his money had nearly all gone, and that, unless she could allow him to work without interruption, he did not see how he could make more, she laughed in a self-conscious way, and declared, as she tossed her head, that it was now a matter of engagements only, and that as soon as her singing became the fashion, she would make enough money for both.

Soon after her marriage Norman had persuaded her to retire for a little time from her more active duties and take a few more private lessons. These had succeeded ; her improvement in singing was certainly remarkable.

No one guessed how much of this was owing to

the patience of her husband, who attended all the lessons with her and saw that the minutest directions were loyally carried out. It was he who corrected the exaggeration of the tremolo by studying the mechanism of the throat, and teaching her how to steady her voice. And it was also to him that she owed her now brilliant *fioratura*—he would sit by her for the hour together, playing the passages over to her on the piano, and criticising them as she sang them. After a little time she was fain to admit that his ear was remarkably good, and that, for an Englishman, he had not a bad idea of style, though his attempts to keep her to classic dignity were often causes of friction between them.

But Norman persevered so unweariedly and thoroughly that it was impossible for his wife with her narrower nature to help imputing some ulterior motive to him.

“They have a proverb in their country about being careful not to kill the goose that lays the

golden eggs," she explained confidentially to one of her intimate friends.

"These *Inglese* are like the Jews ; they are all fond of making money—they are usurers in a sort of way—they like good investments ; and he has made one in my voice," laughed Filomena, showing her white teeth between her red pulpy lips.

She always behaved in accordance with her feelings, never waiting to think or to graduate the shades of her behaviour. Occasionally, when her husband had tried to appeal to that deeper stratum of emotion (which he believed to exist in all human beings, and especially in Filomena, whose very temper had been taken by him as an indication of the possibility of powerful feeling) she had been conscious of something new and vague which made her uncomfortable. But these capacities—embryonic and immature—were never encouraged into growth.

They were suppressed, like the other remembrances which during those cold winter months had sometimes stirred in Norman Colville's heart—like

a dog muzzled and chained, on which he sternly put his foot, crying, "Down, down!"

He had given way to his wife's fancies in everything, even when he ceased to yearn for the sacredness and privacy of a little home to themselves, and resigned himself for her sake to sleeping on a hired bed and living in a hired room.

He did not like to tell her that he could not afford the luxury of a studio for himself till the heavy toll for her singing lessons should cease to be exacted. And meanwhile he had to content himself with working up his sketches in their little bedroom at the *pension*, confining himself to water-colour drawings, lest the smell of oils should be bad for her health.

But he missed the green world and the leafy nooks in which he and Stephen had been used to wander together; he missed the blue and violet tints on the hills; he missed the toilers of the soil—the hand to mouth labourers, with whom he had been familiar at Tivoli. He had made friends with them

all, from the wrinkled brown old men whose faces were like the "ribbed sea-sand," to the handsome lithe girls and boys with baskets of ripe figs or olives poised upon their heads. He had chatted with the old women as they sat with their spinning wheels, and advised them about their chicken-keeping and the store of fuel they had prepared for the winter months. The scenery round Milan was less beautiful, and Filomena was always sulky if he wished her to leave the city.

She liked the glare of the electric light, and the tramways as they glided through the thoroughfares. She delighted in the new houses which her husband condemned scornfully as if they had been run up by "jerry-builders". Above all she was charmed by the shops—not the shops filled with alabaster statues and good copies of pictures where Norman could have lingered. She hated the Piazza de' Mercanti with its fine old mediæval work, or the antique colonnade of Corinthian columns near the Porta Ticinese, where her husband chose to stand like an

idiot and gaze—holding his breath as he was apt to hold it in San Maurizio, where he fell into senseless raptures over Luini, or Sant' Ambrogio with its atrium. But she doted on the shops where you could spend money—the jewellers and the silk merchants where shining and glittering wares lit up by the bright radiance attracted her eyes, and where she could imagine how the circles of fire would glow round her pretty neck, enhancing the beauty of her face. Nothing could persuade her that Colville was not rich enough to purchase some of the shining gewgaws which tempted her in the arcade. She was always telling him she wanted something, either a glittering coronet for her hair, or earrings of turquoise, or a necklace of coral which suited her complexion. And when he answered that he could not afford to give it to her, and tried to get her to turn her dazzled eyes to other jewels in the reliquaries and chalices exposed to their view, she pouted and scolded with disappointment. Their divergences were many. For Filomena's likings

were always in one direction—the ministering to self. If he pleased her, she would laugh with a laugh which rather jarred upon him, since it seemed to be studied like the tinkle of bells. She could only discuss one subject—her own talents and her own success. When he first of all realised this it filled him with shame. She had no sense of proportion, and told him that he was so discouraging it was enough to kill any woman with chagrin, when he ventured to hint that she would be only bringing misery on herself if she were for ever consumed with ambition.

“For my part I am quite content to take the second or third rank among the thousands of artists who are aspiring for fame,” he tried to explain. “It is not really whether our work is admired, but whether the work we turn out is good in itself.”

This style of argument might have been tolerated by Stephen; it irritated Filomena, and she ran at it as a furious cow might have rushed at a red rag.

"That is the way with the men of your nation. I suppose it is your foggy atmosphere that makes you so thin-blooded. *Madonna mia!* It is water instead of blood which runs in your veins."

Norman looked at her in astonishment. This strange little burst of passion, in which the words were jerked out like the click of a pistol, would have made most men apprehensive about the future. But he argued with his usual patience that the girl was uneducated, and that he must not expect great things all at once.

He must try the methods best suited to stimulate and raise her, and after this he endeavoured to persuade her, instead of wasting her time at the shops, to go with him into the Duomo, and listen to the music, which was better than the music at Rome, and tried to get her to feast her eyes on the solemn magnificence of the architecture.

"Do you really think it will give me ideas?" asked Filomena, who had never any objection to discuss her musical career.

"Yes, most certainly I do," her husband answered. But when, as they stood beneath the towering nave and he tried to initiate her into the feelings of those who "dreamt not of an earthly home" when they "could thus build," she drew away her hand from him impatiently, and accused him of talking in this fashion on purpose to make her feel creepy.

He winced, but persevered.

"That is exactly the thing I do not want you to feel. I want you to think how the men who built this cathedral could afford to put their best work into every stone that they carved, and how they could not think of scamping anything because they were working for the great Liberator who came to set even the poorest workmen free from the sense of failure, and because they knew that they were working as a part of a great whole, and that their work would not end with this short unsatisfying life but go on improving in another state of being, for ever and ever."

"I don't know what you are talking about. Neri

would say it was bosh ; but I know that in some way you are aiming at what you call my ambition."

Norman winced again.

Neri was a tenor singer who had flattered her to her face but had mimicked her behind her back, till the time came—since her marriage—when Signor Leoni was beginning to prophesy that, contrary to his previous anticipations, she might after all make a success.

Neri was clever enough to see that Filomena already stood on a different footing. Better clad and better fed, no longer obliged to go begging for little engagements at very inferior theatres, amongst the agencies, the young married woman had lost the haggard and hunted expression which had played havoc with her good looks. And Neri, who thought great things of himself because he sang at La Scala, and who had scouted Filomena before, began now to make up to her.

Norman did not like the man and tried to keep his wife from being much in his company.

"Does Neri say it is bosh? It is a little beyond his beat," he said quietly.

"Take me away—the damp cold place smells of death; they have horrid black bones amongst the relics down there; take me into the open air. I do not care about churches; I agree with Neri," said the woman in her low-toned contralto voice.

Her husband saw that she was in earnest. The religious instinct was not to be wakened in her heart—probably it did not exist; it was as if a window was closed in that direction; he found that he could make no progress in that as in other ways. Still he was not to be disheartened.

"She is very complicated," he said, "and there is the divergence caused by racial tendencies to be bridged over. I can't always make her out, and I expect she would say that she can't make me out at all."

The *bonhomie* which seemed to be in the air wherever Norman was, made it difficult for his wife to quarrel with him.

They were at cross purposes. Had he deigned to ply her with questions, an elucidation of the problem which had begun to perplex him might have been vouchsafed to him ; but as he would not force her confidences, he was left to guess.

Curious, eccentric, romantic, and impulsive he had always known her to be, but he had counted too much on his own influence in moulding and refining her, and it was beginning to be a trouble that she would not give up her old pals.

Art for its own sake—spelt as it was for Stephen with a capital A—was of little importance to her, and yet, she was as well up in the latest musical cant. Just as authors when they get together are too apt to talk not of what is best in literature, but of what their publishers pay them, regardless of how such talk degrades their craft ; so Filomena's chatter was always of different opera houses, the terms paid to the singers, and the musical critics.

She already thought no small things not only of herself, but of the engagements she should accept in the future. In Paris, for instance, she complained that they were always bringing out the same old things.

“Why, if it comes to that, I ought to be able to sing the alto parts in most of the things they perform *at once*,” she said, partly to her husband’s amusement, and partly to his mortification; “but I should be so sick of the unchanging *répertoire*, ‘Les Huguenots,’ ‘L’Africaine,’ ‘Faust,’ ‘La Favorita,’ ‘Robert le Diable,’ and all those hackneyed things,” she continued disdainfully, counting the titles of the “hackneyed things” on her rather large, but beautifully formed fingers, with the air of one who could sing them in her sleep.

Norman wondered whether he should venture on some such commonplace remark as that singing the part was one thing, and the manner in which you sang it another. Truism though it might be her indomitable vanity would prevent her from un-

derstanding it or taking it to herself. He could only sigh as she rattled on.

“ I should like to go to Paris; they say the shops are finer than they are at Milan or Venice,—anything for a change, and you know how fond I am of seeing new shops ; and then I might get into some of the concerts if I went to Paris or London, but I should prefer to try New York or Chicago. If my own country people would only give me the *entrée* by asking me to sing at La Scala, one thing might lead to another.”

It seemed like a mad dream, and Norman had to comfort her by reminding her that a prophet was rarely honoured in his own country. But then came one of those unexpected turns in the wheel of fortune which make so great a difference in the lives of artists.

Scarcely ever had such a piece of good luck been heard of as for a contralto who had so lately been a pupil at the Milan Conservatoire, and not even a successful one, to be called upon to take an im-

portant part at the Scala Opera House only a year after her first appearance. But, owing to a lucky accident, this happened to Filomena.

It took place in this fashion. The contralto was taken suddenly ill, and it became necessary to fill her place at the shortest notice. Neri, who had considerable influence, at once thought of Filomena; and as the tenor's recommendation was backed up by that of two of the professors at the Conservatoire, who had changed their first impressions about the girl's capabilities, the important part was assigned to her without much time for preparation.

"Everything depends upon it, for *you* as well as for me," cried the excited woman, as she paced the room rehearsing her part; "and I have no friends but *you*. If they hiss me it will be all over with me, and there are people jealous enough to hiss. You must stand by me—otherwise, what would be the good of having a husband? You must mix with the audience without making yourself too

remarkable ; and you must clap—clap—do you hear?—you must lead the applause.”

“ And how if they identify me as your husband? —I am afraid the wicked would laugh,” answered Colville, who knew that these Milanese critics—fastidious as the Greeks when a singer mispronounced their language, or was guilty of false vocalisation—would be capable of groaning in disapproval, if Filomena failed in either of her arias. “ I will applaud you if it is possible—if I can do so conscientiously ; but if it is known that the applause comes from your husband, I should say it is likely to do you more harm than good.”

“ Ah ! you Englishmen, you are cold and lifeless as jelly-fish—who else but you would talk of keeping a horrid independent personality inside you, which dictates what you are to do, and which you call your conscience ? It’s *bête* !—it’s idiotic !—thank heaven I haven’t got a conscience to stir inside me like a live thing and keep me awake at

nights," cried Filomena at the end of her little stock of patience. Norman could scarcely help laughing. He never forgot her as he saw her that evening strung up to the highest pitch, and singing her very best. There was something free as well as powerful about her acting, and she had never been in better voice. Once, indeed, she exaggerated her tremolo, but at the first sound of a hiss from the gallery Norman began to applaud. To do him justice he had quite forgotten his instructions; and even in the act of crying "Brava!" he was quite unconscious of the fact that in the morning he had thought he might be doing a mean thing in applauding his own wife. For he was carried away by the enthusiasm already spreading amongst other listeners. An Italian audience is sympathetic—as ready to praise as to blame. And as the woman—whose beauty was of the grandiose sort, showing to the best advantage in the tragic part which had been so unexpectedly assigned to her—made an effort, in spite of the hiss, to retain

her presence of mind, pouring out her rich deep notes in an aria that was a favourite with the people, the tide turned in her favour.

They forgot, what they remembered afterwards, that her execution was rough and that she lacked the subtler shades of feeling. For the present she had succeeded in carrying them with her. The "Brava!" had swelled to "Benissimo!" and those were perhaps the happiest moments of Filomena's life, when she stood with beating heart and swelling pulses listening to the plaudits, which were as incense to her. She was lifted for the time to a platform higher than her low standard of Art, as she gave the air again with brilliancy and effect, though perhaps with a little unnecessary noise and rant.

"*Bien, très bien!*" cried a Frenchman who sat near Norman; while the appreciative "ah's!" and "oh's!" from her fellow-countrymen as Filomena's rich mellow notes (produced without their usual defects) fell upon their ears, proved that for once

she had reached the success after which she had so long hankered.

Her husband did not over-estimate her triumph. He knew that musical Italians were accustomed to express their satisfaction by long drawn-out interjections, and that their interjections on another occasion might be altogether of another kind. Still he was glad that she had been encouraged.

“She is intelligent when she sings,” he said. He was almost as pleased as she was, telling himself that in this way she would find her own methods of speech. “We have all of us different ways of becoming articulate,” he thought, as he walked home with her after the supper, and congratulated her on her performance. If he smiled at her raptures and thought them characteristic when she built her pretty little “castles in Spain,” and meant him to admire them, and if he drew rather a long breath when he found that these castles in the air were of rather a material sort—no more cold *bœuf braisé*, but omelettes and champagne—he did not

damp her ardour, but kept his amusement to himself. If his wife had so suddenly become articulate, other changes as wonderful might follow,—if this process of development went on, she might in time become *spirituelle*.

She had never mentioned his own achievements. To hear her talk one might have imagined that she only was to be the breadwinner in the future. He said so little of himself that he had not told her of the picture-dealers who were beginning to be keen about his work. Their name was not Legion, and as a few of them were Jews it was not likely that they would pay him very well. Yet it would keep the pot boiling just at this crisis, when, as his wife thought herself justified in launching out into new extravagances, the boiling of the pot had become a matter of anxiety.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PUNISHMENT BEGINS.

WHY do you waste your time over those foolish sketches?" she asked, tossing her head, a few evenings afterwards—"why don't you come and hear me go over my part?"

She had to sing at La Scala on the following night; for the contralto was still ill, and indeed it was said to be doubtful whether she would ever be able to resume her occupation.

"Wait for a few minutes," said Norman as he continued to put a few finishing strokes to the picture which—though it was small and unimportant enough to be called a sketch—had to be ready for the dealer at a certain date. And then he added tentatively: "If you could stand for me just a few minutes for that figure in the foreground—I

don't mean just now, but when your next trial to-morrow is over—it would help me wonderfully”.

She had been used to stand for him soon after their marriage, though he had always found it difficult to get her to remain long in one attitude or to give him her undivided attention.

But now she evidently considered the proposal to be an insult.

“*C'est trop fort !*” she exclaimed, airing one of her French phrases. “As if I should have time to sit for you when I should be a fool to waste it. If I can't earn a lot of money at La Scala now, or at some other equally well-paid opera, it will be your mismanagement. That is the good of being married—men always manage these things best—you mustn't muddle my affairs, for your own sake, you know.”

He was washing his brushes, but he looked up with a quiet smile. The thought passed rapidly through his mind of whether it would be well to check this burst of vanity by telling her that he had as yet received no cheque from the authorities

at La Scala (who were probably waiting for a second test before they made up their minds to engage her), and that he had hitherto had to pay a considerable sum of money for her performances. But he hesitated. All his tender consideration for the weakness of her sex combined with his fear of hurting her feelings and giving her a shock just when she ought to be at her best.

“You and I must run the race together,” was all that he said, glancing at her costume a little meaningfully. “You seem to be got up regardless of expense, and by the end of the year it is possible we may need money.”

It was the only hint he gave her of his utter disapproval of her style of dress. But the hint irritated her, because he had more than once remonstrated with her on this subject in the past. “I can pay for my own dress, ay, and a good deal more; you may be perfectly sure I shall never come to *you*. My fortune is made, and all I shall expect from you is a very, very little help.”

“And what may that be?” he asked her quietly, rinsing his brushes in the turpentine and turning his picture to the wall that it might not be exposed to the dust. “You must not over-rate my musical ability, but I think I am painstaking, and I am at the service of my wife.”

“That is not what I mean, you must also set me going ; you did it admirably the other night.”

He understood at last, and the colour darkened his face. She thought that enthusiasm was communicative, that it spread like mesmerism from one person to another, and wherever she sang she wished him to follow her like a dog,—not to protect her from imprudences, but to perform the ignominious *rôle* of an interested applauder, hiring himself out to spread enthusiasm.

Filomena did not know that to an honourable, high-minded English gentleman, nothing much more insulting could have been proposed. It was the very fact that she did *not* know which seemed for the first time to show to him the appallingly

yawning gulf that had always existed between them.

“Surely that is a very shabby idea,” he said, trying to pick and choose his words in a way which would not wound her sensibilities. For in spite of the stinging sensation which came over him when he remembered that in marrying a woman taken almost from the people he had hoped to avoid all the mean trickery so common amongst the *bourgeoisie*, and the underhand subterfuges which he had so much disliked in the upper sections of society, he recollected that he must still have patience with her,—she could not be educated in a few months.

“It is not a shabby idea. I don’t know what you mean,” she cried. “The only shabby thing would be if after marrying me you did not back me up.”

Then, closing her eyes with a trick that she had acquired, like the instantaneous closing of a camera, she let them flash upon him again, and cried : “Ah,

you are afraid—you are beginning to be jealous of me, you think that people will be struck with me as you were yourself—Neri, for instance ; but it is mean to want to keep me all to yourself, and you behaved so well the other day ; you clapped just at the right moment to make other people clap. I said afterwards to Neri that it was splendid of you.”

Again the colour darkened his face. So this had been told to Neri. It was beneath him to try to set the misconception right. But he laughed, and almost hoped that at that moment she would recognise the involuntary sarcasm in his laugh.

“Did you *really* think I meant to lead the clapping ?” he asked with a decision in the tones of his voice and a directness in his glance by which he would have hoped to make any other woman understand that the subject must once for all be disposed of. “Could you really imagine that I had any ulterior motive when I joined in the applause ?

that I wished, for instance, to make money for myself?"

"But you led it, it was at the right moment, of course you did it on purpose, and you can't refuse to come again to-night and set me going again."

"If you expect such a thing from me I had certainly better not come." Then she poured forth the vials of her wrath.

"You refuse to do things for me, and yet you do them for other people," she cried, pointing scornfully to the table on which a few periodicals—the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the *Neue Freie Presse*, and other names which she could not decipher—lay carelessly heaped together. "You got all those good notices for your friend, Mr. Dillwyn." Again he could hardly repress his sense of humour, and was moved to turn his face from her to hide his mirth.

"I assure you I am not nearly so powerful as you think. I have no manner of influence with any of those papers; and if Mr. Dillwyn was noticed in

any of them it was because he painted good pictures. Were I in England and could use any influence with any of the English papers, I could have nothing to do with what we call log-rolling." And his mirth getting the better of him he laughed outright.

He need not have been afraid ; for she took it so quietly that he began to wonder if she had any sensibility. Presently he understood that in her determination to accomplish her purpose there was, for the time, a suspension of all other emotions. She evidently did not believe him, and thought that he was laughing to hide the fact that he was fibbing.

"Ah yes, you need not deny it ; you would do anything for Mr. Dillwyn, but you always look down on me, and to-night I must have some one. If you refuse to come to the opera I will get other people to take a box."

Her manner had become abrupt and almost explosive, and it did not make him feel any happier to remember how ready she was to talk with other

men in the *pension*, but not always with himself, and how apt she was to yawn when her companions left her.

Never before had he had a complicated difficulty like this. To be dedicated for ever to her service in a manner which threatened to interfere with his other work was vexatious enough, but it was utterly impossible that he could tamper with his conscience. For a minute or two of indecision he parleyed with himself, scarcely seeing her as she sat lolling in the arm-chair. Then casting a keen look at her he said suddenly :—

“I will come. If you sing well, I may be able conscientiously to applaud you—that will depend upon whether you are good or bad. Under any circumstances it is my duty to look after you.”

“Ah, I thought I should bring you to terms!” she said, laughing in her turn. She had argued and had conquered; it satisfied the imperious strain in her nature.

But however it might have been,—whether it was

that she had excited herself by this conversation, or whether her easily satisfied vanity caused her to take less pains,—she did not score a success in this second performance. Her acting was not so good ; and the public—no longer admiring her intonation or the shrieks in which she sometimes indulged, contrary to the advice of her masters—hissed instead of applauding. Fortunately for Norman, there were others who attempted to stand by her when she, not easily disconcerted, and very proud of her figure, turned to the audience as if to right herself. For a moment or two there was a hubbub, during which Norman, after yielding to his chivalrous instinct, and ranging himself on the side of the approvers, was pleased to find that her presence of mind and the exertions that she made to produce an unnaturally high note, while she subdued the shrillness of her upper register, had again turned the tide of the popular feeling, and that she would come off victor.

Rant and noise had had their way, and from

that time it was useless for Colville to remonstrate. Glorious as his wife's voice might have been, it seemed to him simply hideous when she hurled it out as she sometimes did. He was almost frightened by her ambition ; he did not know that when women are ambitious it can assume a more intense and exaggerated form than it does with men.

“ Ah, now I am beginning to live ! ” she panted, drawing deep breaths in her excitement, when they returned home that night. All her nervousness had disappeared for ever ; but as she sank down in the big rocking chair, swinging her feet and smoking a cigarette, she said :—

“ Your bark is worse than your bite ; you are a dear good fellow, and not half so squeamish as you would make yourself out. I looked at you just at that awful crisis, and saw your hands going as fast as ever they could go. Well, you would have been clean cracked and blind to your own interests if you had not done your best. There is

something impressive about you, you know ; and when I have *you* I need not be afraid."

"You would do better to hire a sandwich man," he tried to interpolate ; but his remarks were drowned in her burst of triumphant vanity : "You will find it worth your while to advertise *me*. Better than wasting time over those sketches."

There was a cutting edge to all her speeches, as she went on exulting in her own success. There could be no greater proof of the gulfs of being that were opening between them than her utter unconsciousness of the fact that these speeches wounded him, or that he was tempted to respond to them sarcastically.

To help to make the world happier and better, to assist in the unfolding of new ideas and the beginnings of great movements—recognising that personal happiness, in the form of money or even of love, was a small thing compared to the happiness of the many—had been Norman's ideal ; and he smiled rather sadly to himself when he recognised

the comic side of his present form of self-sacrifice,—to be as showman to an inferior singer.

It seemed scarcely necessary to explain to her that he had acted involuntarily, prompted by a chivalrous feeling, which was so much a part of his nature as to become an irresistible instinct. She would not understand him, it being scarcely conceivable to her that other motives should be more powerful than those of self-interest. He knew now that however badly his wife might perform her part, he should be too human to sit by and hear the audience hiss her.

But he need not have been afraid that he should long have to follow her about, and applaud her bad performances—there were plenty of other men to take up the *rôle* for him.

The more she bawled and the more she grimaced the more did some of these men admire her. It was a relief to Norman to find that he was no longer compelled to be present at La Scala when her style became still more attitudinising and vulgar. He

knew that she was certain to be dismissed ; and he had an excuse for keeping away from the opera and preparing for a rainy day, since a good deal of well-paid work had just been offered to him for drawing on wood. It was not work for which he cared, such work being more likely to hinder than promote his advancement in oil painting or water-colour drawing.

It also tried his eyesight and his health, as he had to toil by gaslight and far into the night. But he could not afford to refuse it. Filomena's earnings barely sufficed for her own extravagances ; she had insisted on taking a *maison meublée*, furnished in tawdry style, for which they had to pay extravagantly. The life which they led in it was the life which of all others was most objectionable to a man of Norman's tastes—a burlesque on the life he had chosen for himself, since it was a mixture of cheap compromises and showy extravagance. Filomena was absent from her home either at practisings or rehearsals for the greater part of her time. To hear

her talk her friends might have thought that her work was grinding, terrible and continual. She lay in bed in the mornings, breakfasting late and in that way gaining a little rest ; but as it was her plan to bring several people home with her after a champagne supper, she sat up even later than Norman at his drawing on wood.

He was rarely present when she entertained her acquaintances. For when he heard her noisy talk and listened to the speeches which she made with all the insolence of conscious power, he saw for the first time that his wife was loud, coarse, and self-sufficient. He reasoned with himself as this conviction grew upon him, telling himself that he could not have expected to marry a singer—an actress—and to find her a daisy ; but she made him wince by her audacities ; and his dislike to the man Neri, who was constantly in her company, grew and deepened day by day. Neri's voice was always dominant amongst the glib tongues which chattered on as if they were glad to be liberated after a per-

formance. But it was easy to see that Neri was not Filomena's true friend.

"He encourages her in every conceivable crudity, and in the vulgar flourishes and tricks which she introduces into her songs to make people stare. He must know that it is false policy, and that sooner or later she will fail if she goes on with it," he said to himself.

But when he ventured to make such a suggestion to Filomena she cried angrily, "You are jealous," going off on a tirade as if she had been a passionate injured woman out of some scene in one of Shakespeare's plays.

"No, I am not jealous ; I do not think I know what jealousy is," answered Norman, with a sort of sigh. "All this may sound fine, but it exhausts you ; it is wasted power."

He could not add that his love for her was not of that passionate kind which is said to cast the shadow of jealousy ; neither could he hint that he believed the man Neri to be jealous on *his* side

with professional jealousy, and determined that Filomena's success should be limited. "The situation is peculiar," thought Norman, as he sighed.

For already there were elements of uncertainty connected with Filomena's short-lived triumph. She could never have continued to please a really critical audience. She liked to take her draught of applause undiluted ; but her appetite increased as she fed upon it, she looked for more and more. The woman was a freak of nature—the sport of circumstances. Even her discovery of her own talents had come too late ; her bringing-up and the former traditions were all against her. It became necessary to keep the newspapers from her, the *Secolo* becoming severe. She indulged in changes of mood when any strictures depressed her, and had sudden collapses of every kind. In one of these she said to her husband, staring at him with big eyes :—

" You hinted the other night that I was singing badly,—that was horrid of you ".

"Did I hint it?" he said wearily. "You know any one who is worth anything fails at times; failure is sometimes good for us."

"And that from *you* when other people call me divine!"

He did not answer, or allude to *Il Secolo*, but went on with his painting. He knew that the other people were the men who were flattering her, possibly for their own purposes.

"I think it wrong for them to encourage you in those sudden transitions which lead to jerkiness of style; you certainly have no authority for the changes you are introducing as ornamental in some of the arias, and you must take care. It is one thing to get one's foot into the stirrup and another to ride to victory," he said at last.

The mobile face, which could at times look like a mask, was suddenly distorted with passion. She turned on him a look which was meant to be annihilating.

"Did I not marry you because I thought you

would help me? because I couldn't bear the poverty which was disgusting. I was sick of living on cheap things, and selling the clothes off my back. But you are always running me down. You are jaundiced, because you can't do as well with your painting as I with my music! Oh, I wish I hadn't parted with my freedom!"

He was still silent, only remonstrating when she went on smoking her cigarettes. Smoking, he told her quietly, would injure her voice, and for that reason he wished she would give it up. But he knew that she would pay as little attention to this advice as she did to his remonstrances about late hours. Again and again had he told her that the hours she kept would soon begin to affect the fine organ on which she prided herself, but it was useless to attempt to cure her of her nocturnal habits. As useless as it was to bandy words about other matters. They two were on different planes of existence, with nothing in common between them. He began to see that he had made a mistake in

taking her away from her surroundings; he had meant to do a good action, but he had completely failed.

That Cleopatra-like instinct for charming all the men she came in contact with, and leaving the women to take the consequences, had completely destroyed the domesticity of their private life.

It soon became a matter of gossip that Filomena treated her English husband in a perfunctory, careless way. But as she looked at everything from a personal point of view, with an eye to her own success, she was much more irritated to hear that there was another sort of gossip—a gossip to the effect that the impresarios were impatient, and prophesying the decadence of her voice—a matter of much more importance to her than that the sanctity of her home should be violated.

“Have I not always flirted in an open way, without being hypocritical and sneaky?” she asked in her free and easy way when Norman complained of Neri’s impertinence—an impertinence which

added infinitely to the pain of being, on occasions, dragged about after Filomena to the green-room, or sent for to meet her at one of the side doors whenever it suited the convenience of a wife who liked to have this big distinguished-looking Englishman with his long brown moustache and his pleasant manners, dancing attendance on her, however she might snub him at home.

“If I drag you about isn’t it because it is necessary? I let you sit at home more than half your time over those stupid drawings of yours. But answer me, mustn’t I have some one to look after me when I come out? I can’t afford a carriage, and if you really mind Neri, you ought to come as often as you can to fetch me.”

There was a hint in her tone which he did not like. Was it possible that he was to suffer even more than he was suffering at present owing to his wasted and ill-considered marriage? Perhaps Stephen had been more far-sighted—young as he was—when he warned him against the match with

this Italian singer. It was certainly alarming when Filomena tried naively to explain :—

“The difficulty is that I’m two women. I was one woman with you for a time, when you were good to me and I wanted to be good too ; but now I am another quite distinct, don’t you see ? there was always that other, and the woman you like gets crushed down underneath.”

He *did* see that the woman was dragging him down, that she belonged to him, and it was his duty to protect her. It was a horrible unheard-of thing that he could not resist her, and that he seemed already to be breathing a tainted atmosphere.

CHAPTER IX.

NEMESIS.

LIFE was increasingly difficult as the months went on. More and more clearly Norman saw that his wife would never have the mastery of her art ; perfection could not come from practising in fits and starts ; she had formative instincts, but they stopped half-way, and would never produce good results.

If her husband tried to argue with her she resented his advice as an intolerable insult. The result could have been foreseen. Others more brilliant than herself took her place at La Scala ; and Filomena, who hated to be cut out, made jerky and spasmodic efforts to retain her popularity. Her extravagance was unbounded ; and Norman, who continued his drawing on wood, was now compelled to accept offers for cheap illustrated papers.

And he, who had so keen an eye for harmony of form in every line and detail, or of action in life, was half amused and half shocked to see his wife at one time dressed in her oldest rags, and at another in embossed velvet or in glistening brocades embroidered with golden threads. It was more amazing still when he saw her one evening with a handsome new bracelet, gold with emeralds, on her wrist.

“How did you get that pretty bauble?” he could not help asking. “I have rather an objection to those social shackles; they are said to be the symbols of slavery, and you can’t afford to buy them.”

She eluded his question with an astuteness which he had lately noticed,—a sort of mysterious, inscrutable way.

“Cannot you answer me?” he asked, his lips setting themselves into a stern line of settled resolve; for he had his suspicions, and did not tell her that he had noticed the same ornament in

the window of a well-known jeweller in the Arcade.

"I bought it myself. I have a perfect right to spend a little of my earnings when I choose," she cried, flashing out at him as usual.

"You are hiding something from me," he answered in the same decided voice. "It would be much better for you to tell me, for I mean to find out."

Then for the first time she burst into a foolish hysterical passion of tears. "You drive me mad!" she cried. "You should be the last man to talk about freedom, for you never give me mine."

But for once he was inflexible.

He said to her on the following day: "You had much better have told me the truth. Most people prefer telling the truth whenever they can conveniently do so. Signor Neri gave you that bracelet. I do not choose for my wife to accept presents from other men, least of all from a fellow-singer, who must have had some reason before he would part with so much money as he must have spent

on that sparkling toy." He spoke slowly, but severely. He hoped to gain the hold over her which he could not believe he had lost; but he had not counted on her indomitable spirit.

She had a sense of being found out—a chilling and cruel feeling; but the strong feeling which was generated thus expressed itself in a peculiar way. The tingling mortification of it made her rage. In fact, she was not so much ashamed as angry—almost maddened—at the discovery of her manœuvres.

"I shall take as many presents as I please from other men," she cried, paling with the violence of her emotion. "It is *you* who force me to tell what you English call 'crams,' on account of your antiquated notions. But if you think you are going to crush me you are mistaken. I shall do as I please—you were too mean—you could not give me jewellery; and I mean to have it—the more I get the better." And then, bursting out laughing: "Were you really simple enough to think that Neri gave me this?—*he* would not lavish his money upon me

—it was one of his rich friends to whom he introduced me”.

Was the woman accusing herself for the sake of bravado, or was it perfectly innocent according to her notions?

Norman listened to her with amazement, his heart growing dry within him as she cried in a tone loud enough to be heard in the other rooms of the house: “I refuse to be bound by your foolish restrictions—I mean to do as I like”.

He shivered with the shock of pain, and lifted his hand to entreat her to moderate the over-strained and cutting distinctness of her voice—aware all the time that her words swept into his heart. He had a difficulty in explaining. “You are an unjust child ; you ought not to be so unreasonable about a very simple request of mine—a very necessary request ; but it may be true that there are different ways of looking at things in different countries and different states of society. I will be patient—we must try and meet each other half way.”

“How can we do it?” she asked, standing like a tragedy queen before him, knitting her fingers together, and then rending them apart. “How can we possibly meet each other when we have nothing in common?”

He sighed, recognising the truth of what she said, and feeling, for once at least, that his Quixotism had led him fearfully astray.

From this time he tried to be more and more tolerant—working again at his drawing, and doing his best to avoid the scenes which he looked upon as a sheer waste of vital power—a burning of the oil which should have been economised and utilised for the more important duties of life. Yet he, as well as Filomena, had been powerfully moved, and suffered keenly in the disappearance of illusion before realities.

It was irremediable; he had given way to the impulse of pity and kindness and to the other half-acknowledged desire to put an obstacle between himself and Althea, and now he would have to pay

for it for ever. It was difficult for him to realise that there was nothing else to happen; that this unromantic, unpoetic, terrible reality had actually become his life. It was characteristic of him to feel that he must make the best of it; and as he set himself again to his everyday work he tried to believe that much could be said in mitigation of his lot, that in every apparent ill there must be counterbalancing good. He was soft-hearted enough to be very tender to the girl whose peccadilloes had evidently become a second nature, and tried to reason her out of her fits of temper by good-natured raillery, quoting some comic lines which had just then come over the Atlantic:—

Oh the gladness of her gladness when she's glad,
And the sadness of her sadness when she's sad.
But the gladness of her gladness,
And the sadness of her sadness,
Are not *in it* to the madness of her madness when she's
mad.

“Isn't it a pity to be so often mad about no-

thing? It takes it out of you," he said, trying to laugh, "and leaves no reserve force. For instance, when you want to blow your husband into space with dynamite for the merest trifles, there will be nothing left of him for you to pepper with small shot."

But his soft-heartedness and his fun came too late ; she only remembered his sternness. Conscious in his presence of a sort of paralysing influence because, as she told her companions, he was so proud and occasionally so stern, and his views of life were so different to her own, she tried to escape more and more from his society. This made it more difficult for him to help her, and once or twice he tried again to plead with her ; so evident was her liking for being away from him in her mad desire to escape all restraint.

"You avoid me, and seek the society of others, —that is not the way for us to grow nearer to each other. I am painfully aware that our difficulties are increasing," he said to her one day.

"Then it is your fault. You ought to do more to help me," she cried in her old style. "It was for *that* reason I married you."

He had ceased to wince at these speeches. The bald fact remained that she put her success in her profession before her duty to him as a wife, and that in losing her own identity in her dramatic parts she had ceased to have any individual love to bestow on the man who had married her. There was something formidable, almost appalling, in this histrionic character, always ready to act in private as in public life. Which was the real woman, and which was the imaginary?

She was fond of describing herself as a sort of female Janus, looking both ways, and seeing all sides. "It is of no use to talk about conscience," she had said to him one day when he had reasoned with her on his own convictions of duty. "*Your* conscience may tell you to do what is right—mine doesn't understand."

She had tasted success. The plaudits of the

public had maddened her ; and now, when she was suddenly dismissed from La Scala, she became like a tiger which had tasted blood. He could see that everything else palled upon her, and that somehow or other she blamed him for what she called her ill-luck. She was like a savage, not having the sense to control herself, and not knowing when the crowd of angry and bitter feelings were surging in her heart, clamouring for expression, that the loud utterance of them would be not only injurious but almost fatal.

Her words burnt like corrosive acid as she said on one of these occasions : " Yes, when I married you it was miserable for me. I made a wreck of my prospects, my ambitions—of everything. I wanted to be famous ; but I did not tell you truly, it was not for your sake. I know now that when I am famous I shall be able to stand alone ; you would only hinder my fame—you, with your narrow scruples and your cold prejudices."

He tried to look away from the frowning scorn

of her face. What could he do for this poor soul, so athirst for pleasure and so hungry for fame? Would it alter the fact of the tragedy if his hand unravelled all the mysterious threads, and guessed at other evils that he had long begun to suspect, and in mercy had tried to hide from himself?

“Once there was a little song singing on in my heart; but now it has ceased—the other music has drowned it—the shouting of hundreds of men,” she continued, doing her best to irritate him; “I have begun to think of you as a gaoler always rattling his keys,—a master who means to have his own way. But I assure you once and for all I am not a woman to be kept in the background; I cannot be tied to any man; we do not recognise that in Art.”

She swayed as if from weakness, but he could not put out a hand to steady her. A new suspicion which made him cold, and which seemed to clutch at his heart, came upon him as it had come once before. A woman in her right senses would not rave like this in words of rebellion against

destiny, and of revolt against what God had ordered. Her breath smelt of alcohol, and he receded a few steps, smarting with sorrow at the thought of the deadly change in her.

It was only one more proof of the moral deterioration which he had hoped to avert by marrying her and helping her upwards and onwards, but which seemed to have been hastened all the more desperately by the very means he had taken to prevent it. And yet, the pity of it! She was a fine creature, as he acknowledged to himself—fine even now, in spite of the scornful curves of the lips, making the mouth look hard and cruel when it ought to have been so tender, and in spite of the whirling thoughts cast up like flotsam and jetsam by the perturbed and aching brain.

He began to consider what plan it would be best for him to adopt; for if he called in any help of a medical sort, it would confirm her in the idea that he meant to be her gaoler.

No, he would adopt more tender and private

means to keep her from shame. But this was impossible ; she hated him too much. The hatred had taken possession of her, as if it were some live thing with an independent soul, and she could not cast it out.

Nothing could dispossess her of the mad fancy that if she could not procure engagements the fault was somehow her husband's. And her vanity had become so great that she set her heart on being employed at Paris or even Vienna. When she found that her services were declined time after time, she gave free vent to the anger which was like a sort of madness sweeping over her.

The final outrage was when she found that Norman was trying to deprive her of the champagne and chartreuse which had lately dulled her sense of disappointment, and soothed her excitement.

On one night when he thought it necessary to deny her these stimulants, the intensity of her passion burst out.

“ You are cruel not to give it to me when you

know I cannot sleep without it," she exclaimed, first of all, struggling to be composed. "You know it is because you wish to keep your paltry earnings to yourself."

There was an entreaty in the very poise of her body and in her extended hands. And when Norman tried to explain that it would be better for her nervous system, and far better for her voice, if she would only do as he did, and take a cup of cocoa at nights, the colour rushed from her cheeks and left her face ashy white.

"Bromide is a nerve soother," he continued in a coaxing voice, "and if your sleeplessness continues, I have been recommended a comparatively innocent drug—sulphonal."

"And do you think you will be able to tyrannise over me?" she asked in her madness. "It was criminal to have married me; you who have less feeling in your whole body than I have in my little finger! Go; I loathe you. If you do not leave me I must leave you. I cannot bear to look on your

smooth indifferent face, and think that men like you imagine they can crush us women."

She could never recollect afterwards what had happened. She could only remember that she had kept a secret store of absinthe, to which she helped herself when Norman left the room. She must have slept long and heavily on the sofa in the little sitting-room without taking off her clothes. When the morning light crept into the room, she woke with a recollection of sickening horror gradually coming back to her. Would her husband hold her responsible for those wild words uttered in a moment of excitement? She, who had hitherto been impervious to shame and unabashed by the delicate humour with which he tried to parry her reproaches, was now for the first time frightened. She had a faint remembrance of shouting dreadful words on the previous night.

What had she said? She could not remember, neither could she remember whether he had uttered angry words in return.

She tried to keep up her heart, hoping that he would bear with her as he always had done. But her face changed to ghastly pallor when she found that he had left a letter, which was handed to her by the little maid who waited on them.

Its contents were very short, and couched in the simplest words :—

“I have taken you at your word. You told me to go, and I am going. You said you could not bear the sight of my face, and you will not have to look at it any longer. God knows that I meant to do you good and not evil ; but it is better for us to part, than to risk the repetition of the scenes which have lately been more than I can bear. I enclose a sum of money sufficient for your present needs, and I will remit the same sum to you time after time. I will send the next remittance to your mother at Rome, to whose care I advise you to return at once. I do not consider it necessary to supply you with my address ; but I shall be sufficiently near you to watch over my own good name.

If, at any time, you should publicly disgrace it, the instalments of money will of course cease. Under no consideration shall I ever make them large, since you know my own opinions about simplicity of life ; and I cannot help thinking that the money you earned for a time by your singing, and of which I had of course no right to deprive you, was to a great extent the cause of our present misery. Try to be a good woman. Give up these wild ambitions, and the habits to which such a love of publicity—when it is unsated—will be sure to lead. In an excitable character like yours this desire for popular applause had already become like dram-drinking. When you are leading a different life, or when you are in trouble and your present friends have deserted you—as they sooner or later will—do not hesitate to send for *me*—you can hear of me then through my lawyer in London. All love—if it ever existed—may have ceased between us ; but I will not forget that you are still my wife.”

PART IV.

CHAPTER I.

AGAIN IN EAST LONDON.

MORE than two years had passed away ; and once more Norman Colville arrived in London, to be asphyxiated, as he said to himself, in the suffocating heat.

He had chosen a late train on account of the unusual heat of the summer, and as he looked out of the window of the carriage and saw the black shadow of the houses cutting across the moonlit streets, and admired the waving, silvery patterns on the dark waters of the river, he had much to think of,—almost enough to take away his hopes for the future, optimist though he was by nature.

A friend who worked amongst the London
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dockers, and had taken part at Hull, in the preceding year, in the arbitration between the employers and the labourers, had written to tell him that there was increasing disaffection amongst some of the London malcontents, who complained that they had lost what they hoped to have gained.

"It will be madness if they strike again just now," he wrote urgently. "Come, for we need your help. I do not need to preach to you the gospel of work."

"He much over-estimates my power; but I know his kindly meaning—that it will help me to forget my own woes," thought Norman, with a sensitiveness not common to him in happier days, as he read between the lines in the well-meant letter. Then he shrank back into the corner of the carriage, and thought of "all the things that had been," as he watched the moon, which seemed to be dodging in and out of the dark clouds, as if at a game of hide and seek.

He was not a man to think that all must be

darkness to him in the future, though a terrible tragedy had taken place in his life, and it was inevitable that he should bear the marks of it.

To have parted with Filomena just as she lost her transitory post at La Scala would have been in itself a shock, though somehow he seemed to have grown used to shocks. The mere bodily parting in itself was as nothing compared to the depth of the abyss—the hell which had separated them. He had hoped that some sort of gratitude to him, if it were no longer the love which she had once professed, might have kept her straight.

News had reached him from time to time of his wife's doings ; he did not like to call them disreputable, but she became involved, to say the least of it, in awkward entanglements. He continued to send her the promised instalments of money, and when he did so he urged her mother to protect her from some of the influences to which she was exposed. But if the mother answered him piteously that she had lost her influence, Filomena paid no

attention at all to these remonstrances, but continued obstinately in a course of what seemed to be wayward wantonness. He remembered his other promise, and had followed her occasionally as closely as he thought to be wise. Once when he had heard that she had an engagement at Berlin of which she seemed extremely proud, he had intended to follow her as before.

But just at this crisis a letter arrived from England requiring his instant return, as his brother was said to be in a bad state of health, and anxious for him to become the trustee for his infant son. The letter was a melancholy one, informing him that the young mother, whose behaviour to himself had been so strange and unamiable, had fallen a victim to a carriage accident. She had prided herself on driving with a pair of spirited horses, and these horses taking flight had come into collision with a hansom. She herself had been brought home comparatively uninjured, though the carriage was smashed and one of the horses killed ; but the shock to her

nerves had been so great that she died soon afterwards at the birth of the child. Thomas Colville was completely broken down. The doctors thought badly of him ; and he was alone. However indifferent Norman might have been to the claims of his money his heart turned with pity and sympathy to his only brother. Forgetting all that had happened, and the stringent orders which had been formerly given him to keep away from the house, he hurried back at once, to find Thomas shaken not only in body but in mind by the tragical catastrophe which had accompanied the arrival of the long-wished-for heir, under circumstances which would make it unlikely for the child to live. Norman had not the heart to contradict him ; and found himself forced, much against his inclination, to attest a will which would hamper him with the guardianship of the sickly infant—who apparently would be very difficult to rear—and compelled to put up with the codicil which had been added to the will, to the effect that if anything should happen to the boy

the whole of the property should revert—as at first intended—to himself, as the next of kin. Meanwhile a good provision had been made for him in case of the infant living and attaining man's estate.

It was impossible to say that he objected to this arrangement, as he could no longer resist the look of the earnest eyes which were fixed upon him with an intensity of expression. He grasped the poor thin hand, and said in his clearest voice: "It shall be as you wish—I will do my best—so help me God".

"You must resent my behaviour to you! I was too much under her influence; and now that she has gone I cannot bear to say a word about it," muttered the sick man; "women are so suspicious."

"Why should I resent it? You were always very good to me, and I knew that you couldn't help it. It was all that talk of your making me your heir which led to bad blood between us. Nature has provided otherwise. Of course, I will take care of the

child. I am not made of granite—I am human, and you know I never cared about money—it is money which causes half the disagreements in life.”

But Thomas was still depressed. He declared that he was too old to be the father of a child, that he had committed the same mistake his own father made before him, and had been naturally and properly punished.

“Why should you talk like that? It was much better that you should have married; you had a right to your own life,” answered Norman cheerily.

“Ah, *you* thought it—you never thought of yourself,” the sick man said, interrupted by a fit of coughing. “You acted on the principle that every dog has its day, even if the day begins somewhat late.” And then, lapsing into a sentimentality for which Norman would have never given him credit, he added, lowering his voice: “You should have seen how beautiful she looked in her coffin, with her hands folded on her breast; they covered

her with violets. Whatever her faults might have been to *you*, for instance, she was always a good wife to *me*."

Norman bowed his head, not interrupting, as Thomas continued, still coughing, and speaking with difficulty :—

"It was hard that she should have gone before me ; it is that which cuts me up. I meant to have left her well provided for in her widowhood, to reward her for sticking so faithfully to an old cove like me. Yes ; it cut me up, and sometimes I feel as if the game is up for me too."

"Take the child away," he cried angrily a minute afterwards. "I can't abide to hear its crying;" and in another few minutes he was wandering : "To think that I should have an heir in my old age !"

The case was critical for a time ; and Norman did not like to leave him till the strength of his constitution asserted itself, and he was better.

Immediately he felt the necessity of returning to be near Filomena, and to watch over her at a

little distance, as he had told her he meant to do. But he found that a much more terrible shock awaited him.

His wife had failed in her performance at Berlin. And when the audience had shown its displeasure she had completely lost her self-control, and shook her fist at the gallery.

It was not much wonder that the manager was irate. Few people knew what had really taken place. But it was said that there had been a perfect scene when he reprimanded the singer.

“You will regret what you have said to me. I will have my revenge on you,” she was reported to have answered ; whilst the gossips added that there had been a sinister look in the woman’s eyes, and the manager’s opinion was that she was the worse for drink. But the gossips were all rather sorry when a catastrophe was reported on the following day. The unfortunate and maddened singer had thrown herself out of the window of a high-storied house ; and her body had been discovered so terribly

disfigured that the face was said to be unrecognisable, and the personal identity could only be established through the clothes which she wore.

There had been, as usual, a reaction in public feeling when it became a case of "de mortuis". The newspapers commented on the undoubted talent of the unfortunate lady, and said that she had taken too much to heart the failure of negotiations for engagements at various opera houses. It was added that she had been a victim to acute pain, and apparently had recourse, to a dangerous extent, to narcotics, and her death was unhesitatingly attributed to brain disease, caused by trouble and physical pain.

A telegram, which had been sent to her English husband, whose whereabouts were not exactly known, had been delayed upon the road, and the funeral had actually taken place before the news could reach him—the jewelled rings which had been found on the fingers of the corpse more than sufficing for the necessary expenses.

When he heard this on his journey, and knew that all that remained for him would be to look at the grave, and dispose of the articles of clothing which had been left by his poor wife, he determined not to go on to Berlin. What would be the good of visiting a place which would only be full of miserable associations? It would be easier far to give orders that the few belongings should be returned to Filomena's mother and sisters in Rome.

But the thought of what had happened thrilled him as with an icy horror. He, better than others, knew of the wild excitability of Filomena's temperament; and he considered it particularly unfortunate that he had been absent, so that she had no one to stand by her or attempt to cheer her when she was severely condemned by the manager. To take her own life in the excitement of her fevered brain was an action for which she was perhaps scarcely responsible; but it was in keeping with her character. He remembered the angry lurid light which had flashed from her dark eyes when she declared, like

Sarah Bernhardt, that though all the world might deny it, she felt that she had something in her which would *make* her succeed, and the public should be forced to acknowledge it. And this had been the end of her ambitions! He was almost remorseful now that he had taken her at her word when she told him to leave her, and when there seemed no longer any need for him to stay to comfort or console. How often he had let her ramble on, thinking that perhaps it would be the best thing for her heated brain! He now regretted that he had not checked her. And then another idea occurred to him, making him still more aghast. Was it possible that she had irritated some other man by her rambling talk, and that in some violent struggle she had been either pushed or thrown out of that window?

"No, that is an untenable idea," he thought, dismissing the suggestion as too terrible. Did not the newspapers say that the police had investigated everything? He had read all the accounts, and came slowly to the conclusion that no one

could have had any motive for trying to injure her. Filomena must have destroyed herself. Had she been brought up differently, in the midst of an orderly God-fearing people, the result might have been different; it was of no use for him to dwell upon it, or to seek to alter it now. He wrote to headquarters, and came slowly to the conclusion that it would be better for him not to exert his ingenuity any more in seeking to fathom the mystery of her death. More than one strange secret which was not to her credit oozed out after these inquiries, and afterwards he determined to be silent. For the dead woman's sake as well as for the sake of his own good name, it seemed better not to set the police upon the track, and not to encourage them to ferret out any further secrets of her life.

After a time he was more content, coming back day by day to his old natural self, not so bruised or changed as he had expected to find himself.

And now, when the intermediate stretches of uneventful months had set him free from thinking

about the tragedy, his life seemed to be falling back into its old accustomed grooves—just as life almost always does fall back after the greatest calamities. He was free, and his old companions had sent for him. Stephen, who was now a rising man, wished him to give an opinion on some pictures of his which had been attracting considerable attention in the Galleries that year. Two, at least, of the good ones had not as yet been sold; but Stephen could afford to ask high prices, and could almost always count on getting them.

Norman was going back to Whitechapel to lodge for a few weeks, during which time he hoped to be able to dissuade some of the disaffected dockers out of their idea of combining for a second strike.

“A strike just now would be the greatest mistake in the world, when the public are alarmed about coal, and have not had time to forget the exaggerated demands of the dockers at Hull. Lots of stories were invented about the men on strike; and if my poor brother heard them, he probably

believed them all, and must have thought that his prophecies were finely realised. Of course, it was to be expected, at times like those, rogues and blackguards from the outside may be guilty of arson and all sorts of atrocities. It is difficult to know what is wisest," thought Norman with a sigh; the sigh of a weary man who has started with high ideals and finds himself doomed to inevitable disappointment. "Onwards and upwards," he still thought to himself, as he watched the moon playing at hide and seek in the clouds, and remembered how many broken lives gravitated to London because in the maze of London life everything could be hidden.

He was still a philanthropist; the experiences of the last few years had rather intensified and deepened his first convictions. If he himself had known real anguish of heart, he was all the more anxious to do a little to reduce the anguish of others; it seemed to him more than ever to be the only thing worth living for. But he was discon-

certed about this work, and inclined to undervalue his own share in it.

He had sat next to a well-to-do Frenchman at the *table d'hôte* when he was passing through Paris, who had been much impressed by the Anarchist movement, and declared his belief that it would be only a question of time before men so determined effected another revolution in France. The Frenchman had all the admiration of his volatile nation for the self-devotion of these people to whom riches meant robbery, and who were ready to lay down their lives for the carrying out of their ideal.

"It is not one, it is the many. If one of them is executed, another is ready to take his place; they confess and die like the old patriots, and no Government will be able to hold its own against a combination like *that*," he explained with evident sympathy for the new kind of Suffeeism by which men were willing to show their hatred of the strong, and to prove how much the wretched could dare.

"But *you* have everything you want—you have a Republic," remarked Colville.

The Frenchman shrugged. The glamour of the thing had dazzled him. He affirmed that Paris was "raging, if quiescent".

Norman sighed. From his point of view it was the Anarchists who were likely especially severely to injure the labour movement, and to interfere with any international labour prospects. It was on the tip of Colville's tongue to say that the average Frenchman has one extravagance—revolutions—for which he saves up; and that when the last revolution has swallowed all his earnings, he begins to make a reserve fund for the next. But as such a cynical remark would have been incompatible with his desire to lift the cover off his neighbours' heads and know what they were thinking about, he contented himself with alluding to the increasing strength of the French army, and with arguing that if the rich were swept away to-morrow, the result would be military rule as it had been before.

"The army should be effective enough," he said, "to cope with any number of Anarchists."

To his surprise his well-dressed acquaintance burst into an invective against the science of killing—killing in perfection—millions of poor innocents; and enlarged on the stupefying reflection that society submitted to such outrages and did not revolt against all governments.

"We inherit," he said, "criminal prejudices and ferocious ideas from savage ancestors."

And yet he had, apparently, no objection to a maniacal war to be waged against the entire *bourgeoisie*.

"We must protect the *other* innocents from merciless caprice; if passions are to be free there will be frightful collisions," Norman had answered wearily; and so the conversation had dropped.

But it had set him thinking, not altogether in a cheerful groove.

Progress! What an illusion was that vague thing which men called progress! As if the

progress of England could be faster than that of the United States, where the army of pauperised farmers—which the American feeling would not call peasants—was increasing to such an extent that it threatened to become a swarm of all-devouring locusts, and where the miserable were appealing in vain to the millionaires. Would anything help to equalise things? Was it not in vain to attempt to make water rise above its level? Was there too much force in the world to drive its mills? In his present despondent mood he confused himself with metaphors, and the words echoed in his ears—liberty, fraternity, and equality!—the desire of his generation, but which it had so strangely missed.

What had *he* hoped to be, for instance, a social regenerator, unhampered by prejudice? But a life which had been a little hard at times, and a devotion to duties which had never flagged, had left him disheartened, lonely, and a deplorable failure. “This is what has come of my work, my mis-

sion in life!" he said, turning the tables on himself.

He was healthy-minded enough to know that he should try to shake himself out of such depression; and the next few days were spent in rushing about, looking up his old acquaintances, and doing his utmost to regain the influence he had once had over his friends, the working men.

Few people remained in London, the heat had driven them all away. There were all new faces at the boys' clubs, and most of his old friends Hall people had gone on an expedition to Switzerland; so that when Colville returned in the evening he was conscious of a blank, a longing to see some of the good benevolent countenances to which he had been accustomed in former days.

His old lodgings had been taken by another artist, who was busily employed with fresh studies of the river. Stephen meant to be kind, but was

claimed by friends in the West ; and the stamp of success began to be imprinted on his face and his very dress.

“ Dear old chap ! I am so glad to see you ! But I am engaged to dine at Lord Holbrook’s to-night, and cannot possibly escape. To-morrow I am to meet Millais, who has come up to town for a day or two ; and in the afternoon I must be off to Scotland,” cried Stephen, as he wrung his hands.

But there was a difference scarcely appreciable in the change from the ring of the boyish tones to that of the man who was a trifle self-important ; and Norman missed the unsophisticated air, though he was glad to think there would be no more mooning about Vestal Virgins.

“ If Stephen possessed the power of second sight, as he sometimes used to tell me he thought he did, he would be certain to lose it in his present atmosphere,” he said to himself, as he bent his steps, with a feeling of disappointment for which he

could scarcely account, in the direction of the church of St. Monica's, which had been rebuilt by a friend of his whom he heard was still in town. The church itself was a welcome refuge from the scorching pavement, which seemed to burn the soles of his feet. It was like a little cathedral, with cool cloisters and crypt, restored by the rector out of his private property, as a resort for large numbers who had hitherto not known what sermons could be preached in stone.

A number of women, young and old, were just coming out from the mothers' meeting held once a week in the shady crypt. They looked cool and happy; most of them had smiles on their faces, and last of all came the rector's wife, who seemed to radiate cheeriness.

"*You* here again! Ah, how natural it will seem to have you once more among us! People are complaining of the heat, but it is not hot here. There is a cool air always blowing from the grounds of the London Hospital, and even our

house is not so bad as you might expect. Come in to supper to-night. We are expecting several people! come early, for I want to show you the new rooms we are building out—there is one for our organist and another for my secretary; she suits me capitally,” said Mrs. Austin, beaming upon Norman as it was her habit to beam upon nearly all her friends. It did his heart good. Those suppers at the Austins were generally merry meetings, to which the curates brought their wives, and where hard-worked people of both sexes could chatter to their hearts’ content.

Nothing that they said ever offended the Austins, who took everything in good part, and knew how to appreciate a man like Norman Colville.

And he in his secret heart thought of them as Christlike people—people who did not merely talk, and who, in fact, talked very little, about their religion, but were following the example of the Great Liberator.

“To see them does one good and makes one wish to be like them,” Norman had more than once said when he was quite young and had reciprocated the kindly feeling they had for him.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. AUSTIN'S SECRETARY.

NORMAN was glad to be early at the Austins after spending another hour or two in vague talk with half a dozen independent labour men at a club hard by.

“The men are unreasonable, and the public is justly irritated,” he said, when he sat down in Mrs. Austin’s drawing-room—where a dado filled with well-selected books, over which hung pictures and photographs giving individuality to the room, with carved mantelpieces covered with Eastern pottery, and steps leading to a dais at the end of the apartment communicating with a conservatory filled with ferns and fan-palms, testified to the artistic taste of the owner ; “but we must have patience.
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If Mars is willing to submit to the principle of arbitration, surely Vulcan should do the same."

To which Mrs. Austin smilingly answered, that in the hot weather it was difficult to realise the suffering which might be inflicted by the dearth of coal ; whilst the distress, which might be incurred if the miners and their families continued to be thrown out of work, was greater than she liked to contemplate.

"The solution lies in the hands of individual men and women, and not in enforced meddling," she continued, arguing her point with good-natured persistence just as she had often argued on mooted points in former days.

She was of medium height, with great physical powers of endurance, with a healthy colour in her cheeks, and a brightness in her eyes not generally to be thought of in connection with the East end of London. She was clever at organisation, bird-like in her voice, and nimble at her work ; but the

greatest charm about her was her absolute freedom from affectation and consciousness of self. Such work as she had got through with unflinching endurance for more than twenty years could probably never have been accomplished at all had she stopped to talk about it. As it was, everything in the well-organised parish worked smoothly as if on oiled wheels ; and if any of Mrs. Austin's clever band of workers suffered from languor or wearied of their work, they were like their leader, and never acknowledged it.

“This is our organist's room. See, there is his piano, and there is his violin. Now and then we get up good concerts, for my secretary is also musical. She takes the contralto—oh! I *was* fortunate to secure her. She is so helpful and intelligent. I consider her quite a treasure. So pretty to see her with the men at our fathers' meetings—you remember I was the first to think that the fathers should have attention paid to them as well as the mothers. We let them smoke and

play billiards, and they can have their glass of beer—it is so much better than sending them off to the public-house for it. But my secretary never flinches—she grasps all the brawny hands in her little white ones——No; you mustn't go in there. That room is sacred to a great grief," she added, with lowered voice, as Norman Colville, not knowing, approached a closed door which he remembered used to lead into a corridor connecting one house with another. "That is her mother's room, and her mother is a great invalid—no one ever sees her."

"Only another instance of Mrs. Austin's numerous kindnesses," thought Norman to himself. "Who else would think of being burdened with a little secretary, as she calls her, who had an invalid mother? Of course, it wouldn't be Mrs. Austin if she did not pay for both of them."

Nevertheless, he could not help being interested in the secretary. Evidently the girl was not rich, and had art tastes like Mrs. Austin. There was something pathetic in the cheap photographs

of good pictures, "Holy Families," by Raphael and Murillo, in the specimens of blue china—probably picked up at pawnbrokers' shops—in the art-muslin at fourpence a yard, and in the little tables and milking stools, painted with birds and flowers, which tumbled over when you walked across the room. On one of the tables lay a curious bit of old-fashioned work.

"That is her mother's work," said Mrs. Austin, in the tender considerate tone in which she always spoke of any one who was in trouble. "Poor soul! It is work—work—*work*—as if the fascination of embroidering her flowers would keep her thoughts from dwelling on painful subjects—such thoughts as are left to her."

Norman was not curious; he did not inquire any further.

He thought that the secretary's sitting-room, like that of the organist, was dainty enough, and expressed his opinion that Mr. Austin was to be complimented on the foresight with which he had

supplied each room with so many cubic feet of air by raising the roof.

The fulness of surprise was reserved for the following week, when Norman had been invited to accompany two or three of Mrs. Austin's other friends to see what she called one of her interesting sights.

The sight was pretty enough. From a gallery provided for the purpose the friends looked down on a large room, with an arched ceiling and a *parquet* floor, on which about two hundred girls, modestly, quietly, but becomingly dressed, were dancing together.

"They are mostly shop girls ; we cannot mix them with the factory girls, who belong to quite a different class," explained the rector's wife. "See how gracefully they dance ; they quite like dancing together ; now and then we have some of the men to dance with them ; it is much better than standing about in the corners of the streets. It is our secretary who teaches them ; and they don't much

like dancing with the men because, as they say, they are so awkward," explained Mrs. Austin, laughing.

Then, for the first time, Norman turned his eyes towards the secretary, who was seated at the piano playing the dance music.

For one instant everything swam before his eyes. The walls of the room seemed to recede and then slowly close together again as if they would crush all the unsuspecting girls who were dancing in it. He made an effort to master himself, and looked again. Yes, it was Althea! Time had touched her beauty lightly, but the hues of her face had changed. She was much paler than she had been before, and (could his eyes deceive him?) it seemed to him that here and there—young as she was—her hair had been touched with silver.

Had she been prepared for his presence? He did not dare to look at Mrs. Austin, but noticed that as the musician kept her eyes on the piano, she wavered a little, stopped, and then went on again.

It gave him time. For he knew that he was

drawing his breath in short, quick gasps, and that the blood was throbbing to his temples. Mrs. Austin was certainly considerate ; she began to talk rapidly again about her shop girls, and what a distinct class they were from the factory girls, who used the same room often in the middle of the day when they came in tired from their work.

“They are so tired—poor things—that we give them cushions to lie down on the floor,” she rattled on in a way which was unlike herself—so determined was she to attract attention from him. “We have a cooking stove in the room, and they can warm the dinners they bring with them.”

Norman did not answer. He was still feeling as if he had come back from the other world, and as if every sound and sensation were new to him. Whenever he had thought of Althea it had been as Lady Melton, and it was not until he saw Stephen that same evening that he knew the truth. Lord Melton had married Irene Caterlot, and the world said he was not happy with her.

"Why did you not tell me?" questioned Colville.

"My dear fellow, I did not know you would be interested; and when I heard you were already engaged to be married, I did not like to worry you with outside gossip."

Ah! that other marriage—what a jarring interlude it had been in his life!

Never yet had he met Althea when he had been able to speak to her freely. Honour had always held him as if in a vice. Never had he been able to say "I love you".

"She was lovable, and he loved her;" that was in Heine's "Old Play". It had ended unfortunately in Heine's poem; and he—in real life—had always tried to suppose that he was not lovable, and that hers had only been a passing fancy for him, which might have ended sadly even if she had not happened to be engaged to Lord Melton. He had never allowed himself to speculate as to the possibility of the friendship (which had seemed at one time to commence between them) continuing or

ending happily. He had put it out of his mind when they had to separate—he to go one way, and she the other—the only terrible thing would have been to have to think that he could have been the means of bringing misery into her life.

More than this: he was aware that he had spoken to her in a way which must have seemed unfeeling, and possibly even priggish ;—about duty, and that she did not know how hard it had been to him to steel himself, as well as her—it had seemed to be the only way.

Would she turn against him now? He felt that if she judged him hardly for that miserable and short episode of his married life, he should have no word to say in excuse for his own conduct. And he could not expect *her* to make excuses for him, seeing that she had no data on which to form an opinion.

He had forgotten that Mrs. Austin might be a special pleader, and that the working men always came to her as to a well-known

and accomplished matchmaker. This was the comic side ; but there was another side in which Mrs. Austin could appreciate the true unselfishness of Norman Colville's character. " I should call it a crying shame if such a man should think himself called upon to do penance all his life for the one foolish mistake of devoting himself to that wicked creature. It was just the sort of mistake a man like that was so likely to make. It will open his eyes a little," she said to Mr. Austin that night.

" I thought you were not in favour of second marriages," remarked her husband quietly.

She stopped short amid the mysteries of plaiting her back hair :—

" Oh, that is so like a man, to quote my words against myself ! don't you see that there are marriages and marriages ? "

" There are marriages made in heaven," she resumed after a pause. " I don't say that ours was—so much the worse for us," she added, looking at

him with an arch smile ; “ but this poor fellow—it was no marriage at all.”

“ A most improper sentiment for a clergyman’s wife,” Mr. Austin pretended to growl.

“ You know what I mean,” she continued, taking no notice of the interruption. “ It seems to me that Quixote or Utopian—or whatever you like to call him—Norman Colville is the only fellow-creature I ever met who has literally carried out all the utmost directions about charity. When it came to that wretched wife of his taking him in, he actually believed all things—all things to her credit and nothing against her. He literally gave himself to be burnt, and looks just as if he had come out of the fire.”

And Mrs. Austin, whose distinguishing characteristic it was that she was imbued with that passion of feeling without which none of us can comprehend the higher forms of Christianity, turned away to hide the tears in her eyes, as she added beneath her breath : “ And that other dear child ! Surely

she has suffered enough—they have each of them had enough of self-sacrifice. I don't believe in self-sacrifice to that extent. You and I are so ridiculously happy that we have no right to keep the sunshine all to ourselves. Ah, you old humbug, I knew that you were just teasing me!" she added, as she saw that her husband was of her opinion. "'Marriage is either Heaven or hell,' as you used to quote to me. He has been in hell, poor fellow. For the credit of my sex I must try to give him a taste of Heaven."

Meantime Norman Colville, unaware of the wicked scheming that was going on at the rectory, had become acquainted with the details of Althea's story. Her mother, whose brain had been overtaxed, became weakened in intellect after the joint shock of the captain's behaviour and the rupture of her daughter's engagement.

The mother and daughter had to leave Melton Hall in haste, and it was then discovered that their debts were far heavier than even Mrs. Le Geyt had

represented. A time of misery passed, in which it was supposed that the two ladies must have gone through the utmost privations. Althea never complained of what they had to endure ; but her mother in her childish ravings sometimes described their sufferings.

“And they delicately brought up!” Mrs. Austin said to Norman. “What a mercy that I heard of them! Never tell me that those things are accidental. She, poor child, hoped to get some employment as a post-office clerk, or a teacher of painting, or something equally wild! But all their grand friends had turned against them. She showed character, you see, and broke off the match with a man she did not love, and they would have nothing to do with her.” Mrs. Austin averted her eyes here ; for, in spite of the excuses she made for Colville, she rightly considered that the one error he had committed was in bringing himself to marry a woman whom he could not have loved.

“Yes ; she showed firmness there, and the same

firmness and watchfulness in her treatment of her mother. It is sad for her to know that if it were not for her constant care and skill, the poor lady would be sent to an asylum. As it is, we keep her here ; there is seldom any outbreak. We humour her in everything. She is much cheered by the few people who are allowed to see her. I hear that she has asked for *you* ; you must not be surprised at that, for her daughter tells her everything that is likely to amuse her ; and directly she heard that you were here, she asked to see you."

The sight of the poor female Metternich was indeed a painful one ; her powers of generalship had abandoned her for ever.

She burst into childish tears, and then began to complain of her daughter. It was always so. In spite of the invalid's sick whims, and of the fact that Althea was always adapting herself to every change, never murmuring or complaining of fatigue, she could seldom please. Norman looked at the poor lady pityingly.

"How long has it been like this with her?" he asked, feeling the need of relieving the awkwardness of the position by making some remark.

"Oh, ever since she had that shock about Captain Nugent—you know," answered Althea, blushing as if to gloss over the memory of the other shock.

"Does she ever allude to it?" questioned Norman. "The man was a brute, as well as a blackguard. I should think it was wisest not to let her mind dwell upon it."

"Oh, you did not think I ever could have brought her here if she were able to remember, or actually *think* about the past! Her memory has left her in that sense. It left her from the time we went away from Melton Hall," she added, dropping her voice. "Sometimes when she is delirious she will rave about things; otherwise it is best to keep her employed. She likes threading beads and embroidering flowers."

And as Althea bent over the broken woman and kissed her, she did not add the self-reproachful

words she constantly uttered to Mrs. Austin. "Ah, I sometimes think of it as if it were a crime,—a crime which makes me feel almost like a murderer! Had I married the man whom she chose for me, she might have got over that other matter and been well and happy now. Was it my fault that my eyes were suddenly opened, and I thought of that marriage as a sin? I was between two fires, and I know that she wore herself out by her endless persuasions to me not to break off the match. I wish I could have pleased her, poor darling!"

To Norman Colville she only said: "I nursed her night and day through a long illness, and when she recovered she was too broken to have any more reproaches left. She was completely prostrated. We could no longer keep up appearances in the society to which we had been used, and I was glad to leave it. I thought it would be easier to disappear from it; and, thanks to Mrs. Austin's kindness, I have a very happy life. Were it not for my poor mother, I should be as happy as the day is long."

CHAPTER III.

AN INTERRUPTED MARRIAGE.

ALTHEA had said nothing of the self-effacement which had been rather hard for her in her present life. The necessity for the rare combination of firmness with submissiveness and patience in the care which she had been compelled to take of her invalid mother, had made her life a hard one, since it had to be combined with other laborious work.

And Norman, who was often a visitor at the rectory, could not bear to notice the threads of white which were here and there mingled with her bright hair ; whilst the manner, which was a little quelled and over-awed, contrasted with the pretty dignity which had been hers as the future *châtelaine* of Melton Hall.

She made the best of her lot, and continually enlarged on Mrs. Austin's kindness.

"It is so difficult to get in, even when you are willing to do anything, now that trained workers are so largely on the increase and that fewer girls sit with folded hands. Oh," she added, "there are crowds of them coming up to London; the difficulty is to get rooms for them on the small incomes they are earning. We are so glad to recommend them to those new, large, airy houses with cubicles for each woman and fixed charges—that will be excellent. But it is different with Mrs. Austin. She treats me like a sister in giving me the work I have—the work which you remember you were the first to make me like."

This was when they had begun to talk intimately again. Did not that skilful matchmaker, Mrs. Austin, guess that when they were drawn together in the work which each of them preferred there would be phases in their intercourse when they would begin again to talk on emotional subjects,

and that discussion of the most important questions in life would be as dangerous as it was inevitable?

Just as in the old times, Althea had fancies which seemed to crave for utterance. The only difference was that she would pull herself up now and say : "What am I doing? I have no time for dreaming."

"You may be a dreamer, and yet, like Joan of Arc, wonderfully wide-awake to the common-sense side of things," answered Norman with a smile. "I once knew another dreamer—a very dear friend of mine—whose dreams took possession of him and annihilated his common-sense. In that case we had to do away with the dreams, which I think was a pity. For the mystic side of one's nature should not be repressed."

"I had common-sense beaten into me," said Althea, a little sadly.

He could guess it all ; and thought with a pitiful yearning of her childish ignorance of the dangers to

which she must have been exposed when she was thrown for the first time on her own resources, and had to battle not only with debt, but with her mother's reproaches.

There had been no disgrace, because she had committed no wrong.

Norman saw clearly after his own irrevocable blunder that the wrong would have been if she had married Lord Melton. But she had no friends to take refuge with. The two women were alone, and when her mother fell ill the position must have been terrible indeed till Mrs. Austin heard of them.

The most dangerous thing of all was when—as Mrs. Austin had foreseen—these two began to talk about the past. As she had also foreseen, Althea was firm at first in rejecting Norman Colville's overtures.

But in rejecting them she was always fully conscious of his sympathetic nearness, and had never indeed been able to banish from her memory those talks with him in the past which she would con-

stantly repeat to herself, living over and again the experiences which—if she had really wished to dismiss him—it would have been better to have erased from her memory.

She was very human, and this friendship had been much to her. Had it been merely a phase of passion it would long ago have worn itself out ; but the feeling between them had ever been the higher sort of love, appealing to all that was noblest and best in their natures. If Norman had ever allowed himself to think of Althea when he supposed her to be separated from him for life, it was as sinlessly as Dante thought of Beatrice, or Michael Angelo of Victoria Colonna. And to meet her now in this new aspect—working for others and losing her life in those other lives—seemed to him, after the first surprise, to be perfectly natural. She was altered and faded—prematurely so ; but he did not miss what she had lost in earthly beauty, since the beauty of the soul had never been more clearly revealed.

She tried to talk to him as she would to a brother.

"If I acted recklessly—if I allowed myself to tell you too much that was in my heart in those past days—I feel as if I have been properly punished for it. But the circumstances were peculiar—I was in despair, and felt that I had no one to help me; and I had such a lot to learn."

She could not tell him all. How he had seemed to open fresh windows for her, and to make her long after a wider and freer range of associations with her fellow-creatures, and how these new ideas had been stimulating to her intellect, and had led to the natural reaction of her strong and superabundant vitality.

It was true that she had tried not to think of the past. She had worked hard to put all thoughts of Norman Colville aside,—in the daytime, at least; and she had succeeded. It was only at night that sometimes she dreamt, and he had seemed to come to her and talk to her as in the old days.

"When I went away our marriage was impossible," he explained, with the impulse to hold her

hand tightly, and crush it in his—an impulse which he resisted, so that it lay limply in his loose grasp till she took it away ; “and when I married another woman it was with the intent of making things easier for us both by putting a barrier between us two. I know now that I reasoned wrongly—you must forgive me. I cannot atone, though I have suffered enough to atone for a hundred mistakes.”

A frightened look passed over her face whilst she tried to repeat as before :—

“Oh, don’t let us talk about it—that is all past ages ago”. Yet she did not want to forget ; his principal hope lay in the fact that she did not for one moment pretend that she did.

It is curious how the two were agreed. When he said, “Had we married each other under such circumstances we could never have been really happy—never able to escape the idea that ours was a dishonourable marriage,” she rejoined as quickly :—

"Oh, yes, I saw that. I was glad when it was all over; but I never could have been happy in that other marriage. Melton and I would have been miserable—positively miserable together! If your coming opened my eyes I ought to be thankful for that one fact."

There was only one subject of difference, and she did not gloss that over.

"I knew all that was passing in your great and noble heart. I knew that you wanted to make it impossible to yourself ever to be disloyal to your friend. But you made a mistake; you should have trusted me, we need never have married, we could have remained friends," was all that she said, firmly and uncompromisingly, when he referred to the fatal blunder of his unfortunate marriage.

"Can you forgive it?"

"I have nothing to forgive. The mistake you committed was against yourself; you undervalued your own dignity. It is the mistake of too many Quixotes," said Althea, "to carry the sacrifice of

self too far ; to think too little, as you have always done, of what is due to their own personality."

There spoke Mrs. Austin's common-sense.

But Mrs. Austin bided her time. She knew that she had only to plead her belief that Christianity was never intended to stunt the happiness of life to make them reasonable. She was always indignant when she heard it said that sympathetic love between a man and a woman was amongst the things to be condemned. And she began to tell Althea that she had no patience with her. "If they two were everything to each other, why, in the name of common-sense," reasoned Mrs. Austin, "should they not marry?"—"If it were a temptation you had to resist, or if you were called upon to say, 'Hush! this must not be mentioned between us,' it would be altogether another thing," she reasoned indignantly; "but now it is perfectly ridiculous that you should go on making each other wretched, when Nature made you for each other. Such nonsense is unlike each of you. With all the

trouble there is in the world, for you to go on making more for yourselves seems to me uncommonly like mawkish nonsense."

This piece of advice, delivered with the air of a shrew, came like a cold douche precisely at the right moment.

"Would it not be better to wait?" asked Althea meekly. She did not like to add that Norman had only been widowed a year and a half.

"Wait? Yes, as long as you like to try if old age will effectually deaden the fire. I will undertake to say he will care for you thirty years hence. But it is worth the experiment."

"You are trying to be cynical," answered the girl. "How often have you told me that there is love in old age which outlives the effervescence of youth, and is worth it a thousand times?"

"Well, but there is a boy and girl passion of youth; and it sometimes happens during that stage of calf love that children don't know their own minds. But what has that to do with the steadfast love offered

to you? Oh, I know what you mean when you look at me in that way; but if he made a mistake, he erred partly for *your* sake, and you must not judge him too hardly. He took up with the girl out of the kindness of his heart, and they worked upon him to think that he had compromised her. There had been a duel during his absence, and queer things were said. Other men would have made nothing of these things; but Norman Colville is not like other men. He has a fine sense of honour carried to an absurd degree, and, as usual, he was disinterested, and never thought of himself. He was ready to despoil himself, as he always has been; and then, you must remember, he thought of *you* as impossible, and imagined that he had only a duty to perform. Ah, I know it was all absurd. He was not a fool, but too simple,—a man of the world would never have fallen into such a snare. You could not think of him as a muff; but he had that queer simplicity, and his habit of going straight made him get the worst of it at times. It must

have been the worst indeed, from what Mr. Dillwyn told me," added the crafty woman, not caring how she played on Althea's susceptibilities; "and if he erred, the poor fellow has been punished enough. They say he was perfect to her as long as she lived; but it was a strange and absurd story."

Whether Althea thought it absurd or not, or whether there was something in the situation which appealed to her heart, Mrs. Austin never knew, as the subject was seldom again mentioned between them. But the special pleader prided herself on the notion that *she* had at least stated the case skilfully.

"Well," she said on another occasion, "we will not argue any more about Mr. Colville."

"No; it never does to argue with you—you are so terribly deep you always get the better of me," answered Althea, with the low unconscious laugh of exceeding happiness.

Yet hers was no longer the happiness of ignor-

ance guarded from all knowledge of evil. She could not be content with the egotistic satisfaction of basking in any man's admiration. It was long since she had ceased to be the full-grown child who could let society and her mother fill the place of will and conscience, and had striven to become a complete human being; long since she had acknowledged that it might have been kindly meant by other people to try to shield women from knowing of the horrors of degradation and suffering, but had felt that it was more Christlike to know the evil and to set herself to conquer it. There were questions which had puzzled her, but which she had felt compelled to face. And if she had a dream that a higher evolution, dependent on a higher and nobler comprehension of the relations between the sexes, was no visionary ideal, and that, whether they marry or not, all women in the future must be more or less associated with this ideal, the dream was not peculiar to her.

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Weeks had passed. It was decided that the wedding should not take place till Christmas, but meanwhile there was plenty to be done. Norman was disappointed to hear very little of Stephen. With the exception of a letter which came to tell him that the engagement was broken off with the "girl he left behind him"—a matter of which it was impossible to judge, as Stephen said nothing of the circumstances,—Norman had heard nothing till he received a card for a private view of some of his friend's sketches in a more fashionable part of London. He went, and found the room so full of finely dressed people that he was either too near or too far off from the paintings to be able to judge of them. Nevertheless, Stephen had his smiling face and company manner on, and Norman noticed how he thrived and flourished in this sort of atmosphere. He had grown better looking, and even his way of speaking was altered.

"You surely don't like this squash?" Norman managed to say to him.

He laughed in response: "Am I not lucky to get a squash?" And there was no more to be said.

Some time afterwards he wrote to tell his old friend that he was on the eve of his marriage with a rich American girl, with whom he had discussed sunsets and mountains, excavations and paintings; but that her father had insisted on a distinct understanding that he should, if he did not exactly live upon his wife's fortune, consent to take a share in his lucrative business.

"There is," he wrote, "a great deal to be said for letting your wife have her own way; she generally knows what is best. And you must recollect that it was *you* who taught me to care only for perfection. I differed from you once, but now I begin to think that as a married man I should never have been likely to reach anything like a high level, and that, therefore, I might be doing myself an injustice in continuing to make a profession of painting at all." The young artist's marriage with the only daughter of a millionaire

was discussed at considerable length in some of the society papers. He was supposed to have made a success, but he was more or less lost to Norman Colville.

By a curious irony of circumstances these same society papers were teeming just then with paragraphs about Lady Melton's costumes, and complimentary remarks on her appearance, her success as a hostess, etc.

"It is a good thing that there should be *some* successes in life, to set against the failures of the rest of us," remarked Norman with one of his curious smiles, whilst he comforted himself further by adding:—

"Stephen is not the man to be troubled with business botherations—all that about business must be merely a blind. He may be lost to Art for a time, but genius will assert itself—he will return to it."

Meanwhile he tided over the necessary interval before his own marriage by many interviews with

his brother. Thomas Colville was changed ; his heavily-lined face, with the handwriting of character so indelibly stamped upon it, had softened since the birth of his child ; and his table was now less often strewn with business papers than with bright-coloured balls, fluffy squeaking rabbits, and unanatomically constructed barking dogs, with which he made piteous attempts to attract the attention of the wizened babe.

The heir had the look of an old man's child ; and Thomas would often consult his half-brother as to the best sort of education which could be given to so sickly a boy.

It was remarkable that though the terrible distress caused by the miners' strike was just then attracting popular attention, and that though the shareholders were lamenting their loss of property, and the poorer classes deploring the deficiency of fuel, Thomas never twitted Norman with the fulfilment of his dismal prophecies.

By common consent both brothers avoided con-
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troversial politics, and both waited to see how the contest would end.

The arrival of the little puling heir had at any rate destroyed the apple of discord between them.

"He will grow up an uncommonly fine chap—that is always the way with these delicate children, Mrs. Austin says so," declared Norman with an air of infallibility, as he attempted to test the theories of Darwin, by trying experiments with the claw-like fingers of the infant, to the delight of the interested and puzzled father.

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Christmas was coming ; they were close upon it.* The first fall of snow had taken place during the night, and when the morning dawned the ugly streets with their commonplace houses in little rows—in which were concealed so many comedies and so many aching tragedies—looked almost as beautiful as an Alpine prospect. Only for a little time ! For soon the white feathery masses which had drifted and were piled in the roads, would be

either swept into muddy slush to melt into the filthy gutters, or trodden into dirt by the feet of the passers-by.

The windows were covered with the fine tracery of frost, bringing out pictures of aerial forests and tangles of white vegetation, as wonderful as Stanley's stories of the densest woods in Africa.

"When I was a child how I loved those frost pictures!" said Althea to the friend who was helping to robe her in the simple grey dress which both women had judged to be suitable for the quiet wedding at St. Monica's; "but now I know how soon they will disappear, leaving the panes of glass a little dirtier and moister than they were before. Is it so with human life? No, no, don't tell me so."

She did not add—what the rector's wife could easily guess—that having given her heart to this man she had given it to him all in all, till her whole being seemed to be filled with a wild, exhilarating joy. But she said with a sort of a sigh:

"Is it right to be so happy? I am afraid, oh I am afraid that something may happen. Mrs. Austin, do you believe in presentiments? I think I must tell you, I have a terrible presentiment."

"Presentiments are ridiculous," pronounced Anna Austin in one of her most decided tones, though she lost a little of her dignity just at that moment from the necessity of kneeling down to pin a bunch of flowers into Althea's dress. "Just now and then there are coincidences, and then one grows superstitious and declares that the coincidence was foreseen, whereas it was all accident."

Anna Austin was in one of her most bright and elevated moods. She had insisted on the one extravagance of sending to a florist for some of the most expensive and beautiful of pure white blossoms. The church was decorated with them, and Mrs. Austin had declared that the bride must be adorned with them to match.

"There, you look sweet!" she said, as she stood up and retreated a step or two to watch the effect.

"Away with presentiments! I know Mr. Colville has none. Poor fellow! I want him to find out that it is possible to make a marriage which may halve one's sorrows and double one's joys. I am sure I never feel a thing half so much when I can pour it out to Cyril. I just talk him to death with it, and then I ask, Don't you remember what Bacon said? That the *use* of a friend was that you would be able to pour out *everything* to him—your griefs as well as your joys. I assure you it's a mystery to me that Cyril is not poisoned. I've poured out enough poisonous stuff to him to kill half a dozen ordinary men. Yet he holds out still, he has a marvellous constitution."

She knew that Althea did not hear her as she chattered on in this way, and that it was natural that this girl—whose nervous system had been always acute and whose nerves had been shattered by all that she had been called upon to endure—should feel as if her hands were not sufficiently steady to hold the cup of happiness now held out

to her. She could not tell how with that undefinable feeling that at the last moment there might be a slip between the cup and the lip, the girl had counted the days and even the hours. First of all she had counted them on the fingers of both hands twice over twenty times, then it had been ten, and yesterday it was only one. And now the tension was so great that her brain beat and throbbed. Soon, in a very few minutes, she would know if her presentiment had been absurd.

The wind had risen. It sobbed in a wild way as the little wedding party crossed the road from the rectory to the opposite church. The aisles of the beautiful building looked grey and mysterious in the foggy wintry air, for even the frost had not kept off the fog, and it was always more or less foggy at this season in London.

But the seats were fairly full. For a holiday had been chosen, when many of the shop girls and factory workers, whose happiness in life had been so greatly increased by the interest Mrs. Austin's

secretary had taken in them, were able to attend. Some of them, who could ill afford it, had clubbed together to buy a few sprigs of evergreen to strew before the bride.

And when the bridal hymn, sung by the clear voices of the children, announced that the ceremony was about to begin, it was pathetic to see the way in which some of the most ill-clad of the girls craned their heads forward to catch a glimpse of the woman they loved.

"It was she as taught us to dance," whispered one.

"Ay, and it was she who made it all up for me with my young man," said another.

Whilst a third held her head down to hide the tears silently rolling down her cheeks.

"God bless her!" she murmured to herself so that others could not hear her. "It was she as saved me when I were a-goin' to drown myself."

Norman had given orders that a dinner was to be provided for all the poor people who came to

the wedding. His plan had been not to tempt them by a promise of the dinner, but to invite them to it as they left the church. For he was richer than he had dared to let the Austins or Althea know, not having been able after all to refuse the money which his brother had given him now, while leaving him in the future as sole guardian of his child. "She might have had some fresh scruples; it was safer not to let her know; but I could not have chosen a wife who will help me to spend the money better, not even if that poor little chap dies," he thought, as his soul was filled and comforted at the sight of Althea standing pale like a Christmas rose by his side at the altar. He knew that in her heart of hearts she had never believed that he loved her as deeply and faithfully as she had loved him. His passion had always been more sternly repressed, and it was hard for a woman of her impulsive nature to believe in the possibility of so much self-repression.

"The time has come when I shall be able to

prove it to her, so help me God," he thought as he listened to the opening phrases of the wedding service.

Never had Althea's loneliness in the world and her need for his protection struck him so forcibly as when he listened to those opening words: "Gathered together in the face of this congregation". And yet so entirely was the bride without kith and kin, that Mr. Austin had to ask for one of his friends to come to stay with them to act the part of father and give her away. It had been considered wiser for Mrs. Le Geyt to know nothing of what was taking place till the ceremony was over. So swiftly in moments of emotion do thoughts pass through the brain, that Norman found himself thinking of the words of Andromache.

"Father I will be to her, mother, and brother too," he was saying to himself.

Then the stately words went on—words that had been listened to intently by millions of ears that would never hear anything again on earth,

words that had been responded to by millions of throbbing human hearts, set at nought by some of them to their peril, and comprehended by others whose intelligence had been low in some dim, unformulated way. "From generation to generation," thought the bridegroom as he stood listening to Mr. Austin's sonorous voice rolling out the solemn syllables which seemed to echo through the church:—

"I require and charge ye both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be exposed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it".

"I declare it!" shrieked a harsh voice in foreign accents, which rang through the aisles, effectually drowning the rector's well-modulated and resonant tones, "*I, who am that man's lawful wife.*"

"The woman is mad," the people whispered; and more than one man advanced with intent to remove the brawler.

She was tall and of large physique. More than one person had noticed her as she took her place early in one of the front rows of the church. The fineness of her figure and the unusual style of her dress would have attracted more attention in any other place, but in East London the constant influx of foreigners renders any oddity scarcely remarkable.

She had thrown up a thick veil which had hitherto concealed her features, and was looking with an air of triumph at Norman. It was a remarkable face. Dark eyes, burning with a triumphant light—brilliant and intense like coals of fire—lit up a sallow countenance, the features of which had once been handsome, but were now sharpened and emaciated as if from recent illness.

Norman Colville looked back at her, his own eyes dilating. He could hear the loud beating of his heart, as he said in a hoarse whisper :—

“This is my wife whom I thought dead. She must have planned it for revenge.”

The rector's thoughts were for Althea as he quietly closed the book, and begged the congregation to disperse without making any disturbance.

"Into the vestry—she will faint," he said in low tones to his wife. "We must see to that other person."

But Althea did not faint. There is an intensity of emotion which seems emotionless, as if stricken into stone. "Oh horror upon horrors!"

At the first sound of the woman's voice she had turned sick with apprehension. But when she saw Norman's eyes dilate—when she knew that he was covered with agonising, paralysing shame—all her thought was for him.

"Speak to *him*, and not to me—it is enough to drive him mad. Tell him—you know how to tell him best—that neither of us has done any wrong; that the shame is not ours, and that we can go back and be brother and sister just as we were before."

The rector was a little surprised. The girl

whom he had expected to faint was calmer than any of them. He was not sure that he quite approved. But Althea, who was always quick-witted, had recognised in a moment that this was a sort of conspiracy, that it had been planned by one who was an enemy to Norman Colville's peace, with a diabolical plausibility ; and a feeling stronger than shame had taken possession of her.

“There is no shame where there is no sin,” she had said to herself, with a decisiveness worthy of Mrs. Austin. “We have been the victims of a cruel, deliberately-planned revenge.”

CHAPTER IV.

CHARITY HOPETH ALL THINGS.

WHILE the rector was wondering at a strength of character so suddenly developed by a girl who had always hitherto seemed to be modest and retiring, Norman Colville, walking as if in a dream, had followed Filomena into the rectory, where Mrs. Austin had told him it could be arranged for him to see her.

His heart fainted within him when he opened the door of the little sitting-room where Anna Austin, paler than usual, but ready as ever to keep her presence of mind in emergencies, had told him they could speak together without fear of being overheard. But for some time there was no thought of speaking. Filomena stood in the middle of the room, and she laughed,—not the

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artificial laugh like a ripple of bells which had irritated him in the former days, but a laugh that chilled his blood. The laughter was loud and uproarious.

“You look so odd—what is it?” she asked when she had exhausted herself. “Are you not glad to see me?”

The voice was strange. It was hoarse and strained, the rich full tone had gone from it for ever. She spoke sarcastically and irritably.

“If you were the man you pretended to be, you would be glad to hear that I was saved from a terrible fate.”

“Then some one else was dressed in your costume, —some one else who had determined to commit suicide ; the whole thing is too ghastly,” he said.

She laughed again.

“Not exactly that—I did not pay her to kill herself. It was like this. We changed clothes. I was tired of my life, and wanted to get away from it. The manager behaved like a dog, keeping me

to my bargain and paying me with curses. So I got another woman to help me to put them off the scent. I gave her some money ; she was, as you say, a bad lot. They were carousing together that night—she and some of her friends. I suppose there was what you English call a row. Perhaps they pushed her out of the window,—perhaps they did and perhaps they did not. I heard that they picked her up and took her for me. It seemed to me a fine chance. Oh yes ; I pretended to be dead. I wanted to test you—it would have been such a joke if you had married some other woman—why do you look so ridiculously long-faced ? ”

He felt himself wincing at every word she said, as a nerve vibrates in agony.

“ Would you rather that I were dead ? ”

“ I would rather that you had not played such a cruel joke on another woman who never wronged you,” he answered, speaking huskily when he could find his voice.

“ The other woman—oh, I forgot—I meant to test *you*—what does it matter about the other woman ? ”

His lip quivered.

“ Perhaps you have also forgotten that you asked me to leave you ? ”

“ But I didn’t mean you to go to another woman.”

The voice now was not only strained, it was hard and cruel.

Colville did not answer ; he was sick at heart. The change in her shocked him. This was not the girl he had ever thought it possible to love, and from whom he had parted. Things terrible at the time had almost assumed a tender aspect under the softening haze of memory. But the reality had come back to him, and he could not send her away.

He got her away from Mrs. Austin’s house as quickly as he could, to provide her with a suitable lodging. But even that was horrible to him. She asked for brandy, and poured it out in a tumbler.

The apology she made was almost worse, for he knew it was not true.

“Don’t think I take that as a rule ; I’ve left off taking it. I only take what the doctors order me.”

Could it be possible that she was still indulging in this horrible vice ? how else could she have had sufficient energy to have played the part she had played that day ?

How rudely and curiously the servants looked at her ! He told them to mind their manners, and then sent them away.

“That’s right,” she said ; “I won’t have troublesome, mischief-making people about me !” And she staggered to the sofa.

He did not know if the comedy or the tragedy of that day had been the more terrible.

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Days passed like this in utter darkness. Bright and hopeful as he was by nature, not a ray of light seemed to dawn for him. It was hard and bitter

for a man who had suffered so much to have to go through this new form of trial.

He never left the lodgings during the day ; but once or twice during the night watches he had hurried out for a breath of air when, in spite of the "very houses" seeming "asleep," the unkempt night prowler, the more ill-fated woman, the toiling compositor, or, perchance, a wharfman hurrying down to the riverside, were still to be encountered in the streets. In the little network of byeways branching out of Mile End Road, he sometimes heard the urgent knocking of the hired rousers of somnolent workmen, who had to wake for an early job.

"Half-past three, half-past three !"

And once as the half-dressed toilers had to rise reluctantly from their hard couches to begin the work of another day, a man staggered against him in a half-somnolent condition, muttering sullenly :
"I am an Anarchist !"

"What is an Anarchist?" asked Norman,

coming to a standstill, and looking him in the face.

"Blowed if I know!" answered the fellow, who was now awake, and taken aback by the question.

"They are like children playing with fire. And *I* once thought to aid them in their difficulties—I who am in greater straits myself, and who may have done mischief when I meant to do good—have no longer the heart even to try."

"Can we help ourselves by the popular cry of 'Death to the Anarchists, and all the evil brood from which they spring,' when that evil brood may be modern society itself?" thought the disheartened philanthropist as he bent his own steps back again, glancing up at the lights still shining in the London Hospital, where a soul was perhaps at that moment passing into Eternity, or a consultation taking place over a critical case.

He felt weary and humiliated; and the sight of the great gaunt building, where so many tragedies were ended, did not do much to cheer him. He

had blundered, and he knew it—he was never less cheered by that faith which had its roots embedded and deeply hidden in his nature, and which would assert itself by-and-by.

Meanwhile Althea had been thinking; and the forms which her thoughts took proved astonishing to the Austins. She pitied Norman's wife, and saw all the pathos of the situation. If, as she reasoned, this woman had something deformed in her nature—if she had been sinful and needed to be lifted out of her sin—all the more need was there for her to have one of her own sex to help her. It suddenly occurred to her that she might still act as a sister to a brother, and that she might have strength to influence Filomena. She had heard through Mrs. Austin that Norman was especially puzzled because he could find out so little of what had passed in the interim—all the intermediate history from the time when he had left his wife till when she appeared again remaining an impenetrable mystery. Perhaps—so Althea

thought—she might be persuaded to pour her tale into sympathetic ears, and in that case the hardness might melt away.

Norman was never more astonished than when—towards the end of that week—Althea was announced, followed by Mr. Austin.

“I have come to see if I can be of any use to you—Oh, you must not deny me!—you must look upon me as a sister! We cannot bear to think of your being left alone in a trouble like this,” she added, trying to speak in a careless tone, though the break in her voice betrayed her. “I am sure you will do your best; but when a woman is ill she needs another woman to help her—your wife must feel *so* desolate here in a strange country. Mr. Austin has come to back me up. He thinks I am quite right. I must see her to-night. Do not let us put it off,” she said, turning triumphantly upon the clergyman, who had been coerced into sharing her opinion, and was following somewhat shamefacedly behind her.

Norman tried to speak; but it seemed to his own

distorted fancy that his teeth were set, and he could only emit an ugly sound—like that of a soul in pain—stifled and involuntary.

All the disgust at his poor wife's coarseness, at the words which she had uttered when her brain was weakened by drink, all his sensation of recoiling from the debased state of the unhappy woman, came upon him intensified as he saw Althea.

His first impulse was to say, "I cannot bear to see you here," and to upbraid Mr. Austin for bringing her; his next was to exclaim: "You don't know what you ask—it is impossible—it would kill you—you must not think of it".

"I have not got to think about it," answered Althea, careless of grammar in her excitement. "I have simply to act; my duty is plain." And then, with a strange smile: "It might be a good thing if it did kill me; but I don't expect it. I feel too strong."

"Our secretary," said Mr. Austin quietly, as if to quench all excitement, "would never occupy the post she does if she were ready to fly from the

sight of sufferings which she could not endure to see. So far as I understand, the case will come naturally to her: she has dealt with many like it, and has been singularly successful with an unusual amount of tact."

Norman could scarcely hear him out.

"There are women," he interrupted, "who can pass through mire for the sake of others without defilement. But I cannot bear that *she* should pass through it for my sake!"

Then pleaded Althea, who had recovered her calmness: "It is with me as it was before. I can hope for no peace, no certainty of any kind, except in doing my duty." He did not argue any more. He could not speak of the horrid thoughts to which his wife gave vent when she was unconscious of what she said. It was as if in the mechanism of memory she would now and then turn the handle of some complex machinery and boast of horrors which he had never suspected but which started into life. Might not the meeting of the two women

bring on fresh complications and lead to some further wretched misapprehension? But while he still hesitated Althea passed him, opening the door of the room where the invalid lay tossing about uneasily on the sofa.

A minute afterwards the two men knew by the crackling of the fire that she was making it up, while her voice could be heard, speaking in dulcet tones as she would to a child, coaxingly and kindly.

"You can leave them to themselves—you over-estimate the danger—she is a capital sick nurse, and we have found her power almost mesmeric in some of these cases," said the rector, after an interval. "Go out and get a walk—you look sadly in want of it. If I were you I would take up bachelor quarters at Toynbee Hall, and let Miss Le Geyt be installed here as sick nurse. It will be much easier than having any one else—you may trust her not to talk."

No one ever knew exactly what passed between

the two women, and how Althea had to win the battle not only over the fierce determination of Norman's wife, but over the feeling of repulsion which she had to conquer in herself, knowing that the nobler way was to "take up the cross, despising the shame".

Yet the first sight of the artificial, made-up face, with the premature lines of hatred on it, made her recede a step or two. The expression of it was vindictive, and Filomena's angry cry :—

"Why do you come near me? Don't you know how I hate you? I meant to bring disgrace upon you, and I hope you felt humiliated," struck her freezingly.

She retreated a few steps, and then a great wave of feeling—a sense of the sympathy due from humanity to humanity—came upon her as she saw this other woman in her unutterable desolation.

"You should not say that. I am sure you do not mean it," she pleaded, trying to conquer her heart sickness, and holding out her hand, though

her nerves were torn and her fingers quivering with the effort made to control herself.

“Not mean it! I lived for this—I was content to live a hard life, if I could only make him suffer for taking me at my word, and trying to pay me out by leaving me. It has come, and I wish it had been worse. I meant to have let you two marry, and then appear when it was too late. But I was in too great a hurry—I felt too bad and ill. I could not hold out. And I wanted my revenge before I died.”

Althea shuddered. It seemed to her as if the thought was too diabolical to have been really harboured by any woman. It gave her a sensation of evil, which sent an icy chill to her own heart. Once more she stammered: “You should not say such things”.

And then she remembered that Norman had said he did not like to leave them alone, for that his poor wife had horrid thoughts. And once more a great wave of pity swept over her, and brought the

tears into her eyes as she remembered that poor Filomena was not responsible for her thoughts, and that it was only her evil habit which had endowed her with this terrible and murderous hate.

Was it true that a woman could never be cured of drunkenness, when they said it was so possible to cure a man? She could not bear to think it, for the sake of her sex. And she recalled in a vague way how she had heard from one of the young doctors at the London Hospital of a curious new plan they were adopting in Paris of mesmerising people, to make them think the drink hateful.

"It is a question of will-power," the young doctor had said. "Here, in England, we are afraid of adopting such a method, because it is a dangerous power, and can be used for evil as well as for good. But, you see, if you can dominate the mind of the patient, and make him think the alcohol horrible, the chances are in favour of his never touching the stuff again."

The idea had interested her; she could not

exactly have told why at the time, but possibly because she was, like many women, interested in medical subjects. It came back to her now—the idea that all moral madness or irresistible abnormal impulses said to exist, as in the case of a dipsomaniac or a kleptomaniac, might be overcome by the intervention of some other dominant force. That was the basis of the theory—the possibility of such a dominating force of which the young physician had discoursed a good deal.

“Oh, if I only put it into practice—if I knew how,” she said to herself, as she took the hand, which was hot and dry, and began to stroke it gently in the same way in which she had often stroked her invalid mother’s. Then she as softly touched the hair, as if she were trying to smooth and rearrange it.

“What a quantity you have of it, and how beautiful it is!” she said, speaking to the invalid in the French which Filomena had interspersed with broken English (unfortunately, she did not know

Italian). "We seldom see that blue-black colour in England. It is just the shade of a raven's wing."

And the Italian, who had always liked to be flattered, lay back exhausted, and did not answer her. Althea saw that her large dark eyes were unnaturally dilated, and that there was a sense of constriction in the throat. But as she began to stroke the hair, continuing her gentle massage in much the same way as she had massaged the hands, so as to bring down the blood from the heated brain, the heavy eyelids drooped and the unhappy woman slept. Althea did not leave her, but sat by her listening to the long-drawn breaths.

Her difficulty was to come. She guessed how it would be. For after sleeping about an hour, during which time Althea had removed her bonnet and warmed some milk in a saucepan, Filomena woke.

First of all, she evidently did not remember what had happened; for she involuntarily put up her hand and asked for brandy. Althea brought the milk; but she dashed it away, pointing to the cupboard

where the brandy was kept. "I dare say it will not do for her to leave it off all at once," thought Althea, as she put a dash of brandy into the milk.

"It is so nasty!" she said, tasting it. "Brandy is disgusting. I can't bear the smell of it in the room."

Filomena looked astonished, as her nurse with a beating heart knelt down by her side, and coaxed her to take the milk—only flavoured with the brandy. As soon as she had done so, she was careful to recommence the massage, fixing her eyes on Filomena's as she repeated words of friendly comfort, knowing that ordinary commonplaces would not do here.

In a little while she was again asleep.

The difficulty was repeated, when after another hour the sick woman awoke once more, and asked again for the stimulant, imploring Althea to give it to her.

Then it was as she had expected. When the Italian was no longer under the influence of drink

she began to realise her own condition, bursting into helpless sobs.

These were no longer tears of fierce determination, but wild, inarticulate cries of remorse and bitter regret.

"What did I do?" she cried, turning her face on the pillow of the sofa, its emaciation sharpening the fine outlines of her profile. "I never was downright bad, and you are so kind to me, and *he*, oh he was goodness itself; the other men who made love to me forsook me directly I was a failure, and some of them tried to make me fail. Why did I pretend that I was dead? If I had asked him he would have forgiven me, he would have come back to me. But I was wild. I wanted to make him suffer, and when I heard he was engaged to be married I wanted to bring shame on him. I did not think of you; only I thought the English were so strait-laced that it would be fun to make you miserable and ashamed."

"There you were wrong," answered Althea, in

the soothing, almost cooing voice in which she had spoken to her throughout. "There is no shame where there is no sin."

She could not have gone through her task had not Mr. Austin backed her up in it by impressing this strongly on her mind. "You could humiliate us and put us in a false position, but you could not make us wicked."

"I have spoiled my own life, and I tried to spoil yours; it was natural to try to drag you down with me: one wants company even in hell!" cried Filomena — in the confused nightmare of her thoughts—trying to push Althea from her, as she recognised her for the bride her husband had chosen, and resented the differences between them.

"Don't use those words. I don't like to hear you use them."

"You don't understand; you are one of the milk-and-watery sort; I always knew he cared for that sort. Milk and not blood runs in your veins; but I *know I have been in hell.*"

Her eyes were growing wild again, distraught with some new incomprehensible fear.

"What a fool I am to get frightened!" thought Althea, as she answered calmly:—

"It is a good thing to feel like that, and to know the joy of coming out of it. A priest would tell you that there is hope for any one who wants to get out of hell. Shall I send for a priest who can talk to you in Italian?" The proposal was irritating.

"I am not one of the women who knuckle down to their priests and tell them everything," said Filomena surlily; "I would rather tell *you*: there is something in your milk-and-watery face which makes it difficult to keep an iron safe inside one, and padlock up one's thoughts as I have done lately. But I am tired—*so* tired! I must have more of the brandy."

"I have told you it is nasty, horribly nasty; it will kill you; do not take more of it. Wait, at least, till the doctor comes," pleaded Althea, once more trying to dominate her by the power of the eye.

But this time the experiment failed. Filomena struggled with her. And even if Althea's physical strength had been greater than it was, she could not have resisted those imploring eyes. She had been personally humiliated, but her humiliation could not make her cruel. Once more she mixed a little of the brandy with the milk, and sat by the exhausted woman, gently stroking her head, till she fell for the third time into a troubled sleep.

Then Althea watched patiently. Her back was aching badly, but she was so interested in her experiment that the excitement of it kept her up.

As Filomena slept she studied her altered face. She saw that before her illness she must have been very handsome. The havoc that had been wrought in it was caused by a special form of vice—or vicious disease. The features were swollen, the complexion, where the face powder had been rubbed off, was blotched, and the lips were dry and parched.

“Hell!”—she believed in it, for she said she had been in it. She had felt like a soul banished in

desolation, far from the love of God. And this was, more or less, the case with every one. "Did not every one know that the choice was given him to rise to the stars, or sink lower and lower to abysmal depths? If she had trusted in God ; if faith could have helped her ——" thought Althea after a pause, leaving her question unfinished, and wondering if it were with this girl as it is with so many ; if the ages of faith seemed far away, and she believed only in fatality.

There was a gentle knock at the door. It was not Norman ; it was Mr. Austin. A feeling of delicacy had kept him away ; but he had come to ask Althea to let him relieve her by sending for another nurse.

Althea shook her head.

"I shall stay with her to-night," she said determinedly. "He shall take my place if I am obliged to lie down to-morrow. But tell him to be kind, —as kind as he can. I know it must be hard," she said through the gathering tears. "I am expecting the doctor ; he left word he would be here about this time, but the landlady told me he said it could not

last long. That is the worst of it," she added. "Mr. Newton thinks she must have been exhausted by the voyage—she was terribly ill before it."

And then she said, in a low tone : " I wan ther to look different when he sees her ".

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The end did not come so soon as had been expected. Filomena lived to look different when Norman saw her. She was sleeping in the calm way in which Althea only could make her sleep ; —no longer breathing heavily, in a sort of stupor hideous and dreadful to see, with features swollen and inflamed, but with much of her former beauty restored.

The alcohol had been decreased by slow degrees ; but Althea proved to be the only nurse whose treatment was successful.

" It is one nature acting on that of another ; that is the explanation of the case," she said, when people wondered ; " the sympathy between us must after all be strong."

She did not say how much energy she had brought to bear on the treatment, nor how often the hours she had spent in that room had been like years to her, sickening her with disappointment.

But to Norman—who had been outraged and filled with loathing at the spectacle of the wretched woman who had been deaf to his appeals; and insensible to his indignation,—it seemed as if a miraculous intervention had taken place.

“I have often wondered at you ; you have been so very calm and quiet,” said Mrs. Austin ;—she did not add, “so angelically patient”.

Althea did not answer, but she was thinking : “Was not Christ upon the Cross calm and simple? Did He not pray that if it were possible the cup might pass from Him?”

She took no credit to herself for not having yielded to fussy or hysterical agitation. She had a direct way of doing her duty. “Would it be right? Would it be honourable?”

“I think I was quite right to come,” she explained

to those who wondered ; “ I think it was better even for *me* not to allow myself to be dominated by a horror which, after all, did not exist. I shall always be glad that I came.”

She had all sorts of excuses to make for the suffering woman who had become her friend as the months went on, and who lived long enough to place her hand in Norman’s before she died.

Many crimes which society was so ready to condemn, and which seemed so dreadful to outsiders, might, according to this special pleader, be not more unpardonable than the little mean foibles of everyday life. “ Character and motive,” as she pleaded, “ had to be taken into account ; and ordinary humanity,” as she added, “ knows so little about its own motives, or those of its fellow-creatures.”

“ If I had not forced myself to come here that scene in the church might have remained a vague accusing nightmare in my mind, which I might never have been able to shake off ; but now it is such

a comfort for me to remember that Filomena learnt to love me a little, and from loving me—was it not strange?—learnt to believe again in the love of God. Norman is always ready to reproach himself, and to declare that his blunder in marrying her, a daughter of the people, when he thought he was separated from me for ever, was the cause of all the mischief, and the one great blunder of his life ; but I always think of the poor creature's state as one of disease, one that ought to be curable. And as to myself, I am abundantly rewarded. I did not think that I alone could have been so successful in the little plans which I adopted. Norman need no longer fear being haunted by anything ghastly. It was terrible at the time, but there is peace now ; and I am so glad I did what little I could for her."

"The age of miracles is not over, but they require saints to work them—and saints are rare," as Norman Colville said to himself.

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"*A GRAY EYE OR SO*," "*I FORBID THE BANNS*," ETC.,

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IN 3 VOLUMES.

IN THREE BOOKS:—BOOK I., THE MAIDEN PLANS;
BOOK II., THE MAN APPEARS; BOOK III., THE
WOMAN ACTS.

CHAPTER II.

DETAILS THE FURTHER PROCESSES BY WHICH A
YOUNG WOMAN WORKS OUT HER OWN FREE-
DOM.

PHILIPPA had been for more than a month the guest of Mrs. Bennett Wyse, and she could not but acknowledge that her position was a very pleasant one. She had hated Baymouth because the people in that town had failed to appreciate her—her talents, her beauty and her knowledge of the art of dressing. She felt convinced that in London she would obtain a satisfactory amount of appreciation for all three; and she had not been disappointed.

She had arrived at the house of Mrs. Bennett Wyse at a good time. The *culte* of Introspectors had just been started, and the people were talking about little else. The people in London appeared

to be divided into two sets: the set who clustered around Mrs. Bennett Wyse, and the set who were anxious to join that set. The persons who sneered at her set were those whose anxiety to become amalgamated with it was greatest; it was when they could not accomplish their object they tried to sneer down the Introspectors; and by their attempts in this direction they advertised the existence of the Introspectors in quarters where their name had never been heard.

The season became known afterwards as the Introspectors' Year. It succeeded the Costermongers' Year; and every one knows that the Costermongers' Year followed the Skirt-Dancers' Year. In the far-off past were the Cowboys' Year, the Divorce Court Year, the Submerged Tenth Year, and the Slumming Year. Society in Mayfair and the purlieus of that region had been stirred to its depths during each of these seasons by the topic which had imparted distinction to the year. Every other topic had been forced into a background so distant as to be practically beyond the horizon of Mayfair altogether.

Who could talk of anything that had not a bearing upon the costermonger and his domestic habits in the Costermongers' Year? What interests, political or religious, were thought worthy of consideration apart from the skirt-dancer in the Skirt-Dancers' Year? What entertainment possessed an interest for society apart from the slums in the Slumming Year? and how petty did not the ordinary matters of life seem compared with the duties of Introspection in the Introspectors' Year!

It was never rightly proved who was respon-

sible for the invention of the scheme of modern Introspection. Some people said it was a Finn who had written a play, and others said that it was a woman who had written a novel; but all were agreed upon one point—namely, that Mrs. Bennett Wyse and a few of her friends had made Introspection fashionable. They had, in fact, taken up Introspection and developed it into what some newspapers called a craze, and others a Great and Living Truth.

Until young women read the Finnish Play, and the Introspective Novel, they had no notion what extraordinary beings they were. The majority of them, if they had ever given a thought to their own souls, had merely done so through the medium of the Collect for the Day, and the Offertory at Morning Service. (Of course, no one ever thinks of fancying that a twenty minutes' sermon applies to oneself.) But now they began to perceive that their souls were well worth attention. They had never had justice done to them before. Why, the soul of a young woman was the most marvellously complicated piece of machinery that existed. It amply repaid study; and so they studied it—on the stage, in book form, and through the agency of the Introspectors' Culte. (The Introspective music-hall entertainment had not been fully developed when a new idea that had nothing to do with Woman's Soul was sprung upon society, and Introspection became anæmic.)

The soul of a young woman was a Problem, we were told, and, so far as could be gathered, it was not a fitting companion for a young woman; it usually led her astray just when every one fancied that she was getting accustomed to it, and

that it was keeping her straight. It was very fascinating to young women to feel that they had Problem Souls concealed somewhere about them; and when they read of all the other young women who had suffered, not through any will of their own, but simply because of these Problem Souls, they began to think very highly of themselves, and to sneer at men, who had no Problem Souls, but only those of the most ordinary construction, that ground out the one old tune until everybody had become tired of it. The soul of man is a musical-box of only one tune; while that of woman is one which, when properly wound up, will commence, it may be, with a jig, and then, without even giving the "click" that comes from an ordinary musical-box, proceed to a stately minuet or saraband, then on to a fugue, a revival hymn, a Polish mazurka, and a funeral march.

The Problem Souls were supposed to behave in this way; and as every young woman fancied that she possessed at least one, there was a good deal of mixed music in that year.

But the young women whose souls were written about seemed entitled to go astray every now and again, and yet be forgiven by their husbands or lovers; for it was quite expected that the men would have sense enough to see how the women were absolutely innocent—how they had simply been powerless in the grasp of their Problem Souls.

But whenever a man chanced to go astray, the women refused him house room.

That is what was meant by Introspection.

Now Mrs. Bennett Wyse and a few of her friends had mocked at the Finnish Drama and the Introspective Novel; but they had the clever-

ness to perceive the fascination which all this talk about Woman's Soul and man's soul was likely to have for that society whose very existence depends upon novelty; and they had, accordingly, founded the Introspectors, and given the world to understand that not to be an Introspector was not to be in the most interesting society in the world—the society in the midst of which even the exclusive tastes of Royalty found gratification.

Only one essential to the complete success of the Introspection movement was wanted—namely, a new face. Mrs. Bennett Wyse and her friends were clever enough to perceive this. They knew that what society longs for with the deepest longing is not the woman who has painted a new picture, or the man who has discovered a new country,—but a new face. Mrs. Bennett Wyse had granted interviews to the representatives of several illustrated newspapers; she had very clearly stated what were her opinions on the subject of the great future that there was for Introspection; and her portrait had been published in every newspaper. But she was also clever enough to know that people were beginning to say so soon as they had picked up one of those papers:

“Why, if this isn't another portrait of that Bennett Wyse woman! Haven't we had about enough of her?” And feeling convinced that they were saying this—she had actually heard one man say the very words at a bookstall—she felt very strongly that a new face was needed to make the movement a success. She knew that the woman who introduces the new face into society

receives quite as much favour as the possessor of the new face, and just when she was considering in what direction she should look for the novelty, she received Philippa's letter.

Well, Philippa had arrived at her friend's house in Battenberg Gardens; and even before she was embraced, she was anxiously led by her friend to the largest window in her boudoir. Mrs. Bennett Wyse had arrived at an age to appreciate the blessing of small windows, and she felt that the friendship of a pink light was the most faithful on earth. But when the blind was drawn up a pretty fair amount of natural light was admitted within a certain area. She placed Philippa within that area, and scrutinised her hair with the eyes of the One Who Knows.

Then she gave the girl a kiss.

"Thank heaven!" she cried fervently, "it is all right."

"What? my hair? Oh, I fear the journey has made it shocking," said Philippa.

"Thank heaven!" said Mrs. Bennett Wyse again. "I thought my memory did not deceive me. But hair—especially golden hair—the real coppery golden hair—is such a tricky thing. You may fancy you have got the exact tone one day and the next it is gone. Every one suspects golden hair now-a-days; but not such as yours. Take my word for it, Phil, there'll be nothing talked about in town for the next month but your hair. It will make the fortune of the Introspectors."

And it did.

From the first day that Philippa was seen by the side of Mrs. Bennett Wyse in the Park, the Introspective movement showed an upward tendency.

A newspaper man—the editor of *Masks and Faces*—who caught sight of its glory, and knew the difference between the real and the ideal in hair, begged for the privilege of an exclusive interview for a forthcoming issue of his paper, mentioning that it would be his privilege to acquaint the world with Miss Liscomb's ideas on the burning question of Introspection and the Problem Soul.

Mrs. Bennett Wyse, being well acquainted with the resources of the paper and of the modern art of reproduction, merely stipulated that the portrait accompanying the interview should be printed in colours on fine paper and issued as a supplement to the journal, which was the leading weekly.

“Such a thing has never been done before,” the man explained.

“But that is the greater reason why it should be done now,” Mrs. Bennett Wyse remarked sweetly.

The editor of *Masks and Faces* was a man who studied spiritual movements and other vagaries of the hour, and he thought he perceived his chance. He agreed to adopt the suggestion of Mrs. Bennett Wyse; and in a fortnight the finest coloured portrait that had ever been issued in England appeared as a supplement to the summer number of the paper. The face of Philippa Liscomb was on every newspaper stall, and the newspapers wrote leading articles upon the marvellous progress that had been made within recent years in Art for the Million. A few years ago, they said, so charming a reproduction as that of the handsome young lady, whose name would be for ever associated with the development of Introspection, would have been the despair of artists in chromolithography; but now,

through the intelligent enterprise of the leading English weekly, it was an accomplished fact, and it would assuredly help to make more beautiful many a cottage interior—though for the matter of that, so artistic was the reproduction, there was no room where it might not be hung, and constitute a mural embellishment that only required to be seen to command admiration.

Philippa had, within a month of taking up her residence in London, become quite as well known as Mrs. Bennett Wyse herself.

It had come to her—that position in the world which she had long believed that she was entitled to occupy. She had not overestimated her beauty or her acquaintance with the art of dressing with originality, and yet with perfect taste. She had done well to despise the people of Baymouth, who had not merely failed to appreciate her powers, but had actually had the insolence to call her “the girl with the red hair who made herself conspicuous”.

She wondered what the young women in Baymouth would say when they saw her portrait in the illustrated paper—the exact tint of her hair had been brought out by laborious printings—and when they read the leading articles referring to her as fortunate enough to be gifted with a type of beauty over which the old Venetian painters—no period was specified—had expended their genius and that consummate knowledge of colouring which made their school the wonder of Europe.

She laughed as she thought of the various dowdy young women of Baymouth who had professed to be shocked at the originality of some of her ideas in dress. She laughed as she thought

of some of the men in Baymouth who had asked her to marry them. They were mostly Methodists and in a fair way of business, with prospects of seats on the Town Council or the Water Board. She laughed as she thought of Sir Joshua Haven's declaring that he would leave his son a beggar if he married her.

She had attained within a month in the most interesting society in London a position which was coveted by thousands of women. She knew that thousands of women had been scheming all their lives and had spent fortunes upon dinner parties and dances and subscriptions to charities, in order to obtain a footing in the society into the midst of which she had simply stepped. She did not know exactly what some women with whom she had become acquainted would give to have their portraits reproduced in a weekly paper; but Mrs. Bennett Wyse had no hesitation in estimating what they were prepared to sacrifice in exchange for such a distinction,—and Mrs. Bennett Wyse seemed to know all about such matters. Yet there was her portrait, not in black and white, but in the loveliest colours, looking the whole world in the face from the windows of the news-vendors.

She had conquered the world. She had had an idea the day that her father had made her acquainted with his embarrassments that her opportunity was at hand. That was why she had urged upon him to lend himself to a scheme which sounded like an account of the "plot" of one of the wildest flights of the melodramatist. Her opportunity had come, and she had taken advantage of all that it offered to her.

She had emancipated herself from the life she detested, and now.

Well, now she was by the side of Lord Sandycliffe on a seat on the roof of Tommy Trafford's coach, while the four bays were pawing their way down Richmond Hill.

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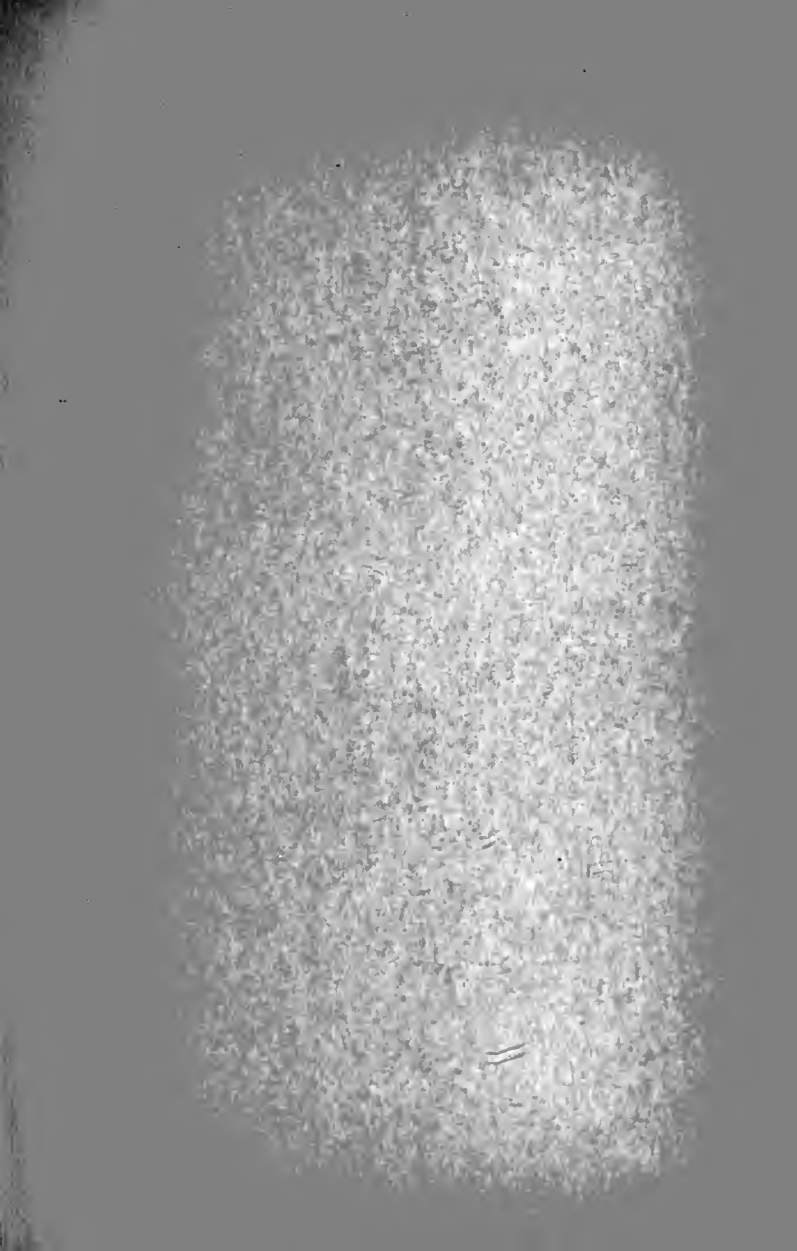
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